

THE IMPACT OF REGIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE EVOLUTION  
OF TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

by

SAAD ALI ALSUBAIE

M.A., Naval Postgraduate School, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Security Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2013

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Since the late 1970s Saudi Arabia has experienced transnational terrorism in sporadic waves whose character has evolved over time. While most of the literature on these waves of terrorism focuses on religious extremism this dissertation argues that terrorism in Saudi Arabia, although framed in religious terms, is not the result of religious factors alone, but more importantly a function of external variables. Taking the role of religious extremism into consideration, this dissertation underlines the importance of external factors on the mobilization of transnational terrorist groups throughout the Islamic world and particularly in Saudi Arabia. It argues that religious extremist terrorism cannot be examined in isolation from the context of the developments that ignite it and revolutionize its doctrine.

This dissertation examines three key regional political developments – the Iranian revolution, the 1990 Gulf war, and the 2003 Iraq war – together with terrorist violence in their aftermath to show how the significant political events transformed extremist worldviews from passive to violent to organized terrorism. Though the character of these three political events and the terrorist acts that they unleashed differ widely in context, scope, and character, there are common threads among all three that illuminate how different dynamics contribute to the evolution of transnational terrorist mobilization. The dissertation identifies how the development of a politico-religious ideology, shaped and revolutionized by the presence of political crises, became a driving force behind much of the terrorism following these major political events. By exploring the interplay of popular perceptions, political entrepreneurs, and state responses, this dissertation seeks to better understand the complex dynamics involved in the evolution of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been accomplished without the support of many people and institutions. First, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their constant support and encouragement. I am grateful to my wife and children who put up with me “always having too much homework.” Without their patience and support this project could not be done.

I am indebted to my advisor Dale Herspring and members of my dissertation committee: Sabri Ciftci, Craig Stapley, David Stone, and Dennis Weisman, who supported, inspired, and challenged me throughout this process. Any errors or weaknesses that remain in this project are mine alone. Many thanks also to the faculty and students of the Security Studies Program at Kansas State University for making this process a rewarding experience.

I am also grateful to many people who offered their insights and shared their knowledge on the topic. I would like to thank Dr Abdulrahman Al-Hadlaq for answering my questions and putting up with my long interviews. I am also very thankful to Naser Al-Huzaimi for sharing his experience and insights. I thank many anonymous reviewers and friends for their valuable comments.

I am also grateful to the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR) for selecting me as the council’s Distinguished International Security Studies Fellow in 2012. I am indebted to Dr. John Duke Anthony, the founding President and Chief Executive Officer of NCUSAR, for sharing his insights and vast knowledge on the Gulf region. I owe particular thanks to Patrick Mancino, executive vice president of NCUSAR for his constant support. I am also grateful to Mark Morozink and Mariam Klait for their invaluable assistance throughout this process. Many thanks to the staff at NCUSAR for their professionalism and friendship.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to three people whose sacrifices and support made it possible. My wife, Madawy, and my children, Lyan and Khalid.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

In the dawn of 20 November 1979, an extremist group took over the Holy Mosque of Makkah (Mecca) leaving more than 260 people dead and hundreds injured. This violent incident came as a shock not only because it was the first in the modern history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but more importantly, because it occurred in Islam's most sacred shrine where violence is strongly prohibited. Since then, the Kingdom has witnessed sporadic waves of transnational terrorism, which has grown to dominate the international security agenda.

### **Extremist-Religiosity: an Insufficient Explanation**

This dissertation will take a different and somewhat iconoclastic look at the rise of terrorism in Saudi Arabia. In contrast to the dominant approach that explains terrorism in Saudi Arabia as a result of extremist religiosity, I will argue that terrorism in Saudi Arabia, although framed in religious terms, is not the result of religious factors alone, but more importantly a function of external variables.

Since the worldwide rise of religious violence in the 1970s, there has been a debate among scholars and analysts on the role of religion in violence. According to Jonathan Eastvold (2006), two main approaches dominate this debate. The first is the *essentialist* which focuses “on religion (or related identities) as the principal cause (or solution) to conflict and view[s] theological purity as one of the hallmarks of religious militancy” (p. 4). The second approach is the *reductionist* which “assert[s] that religious symbols and rhetoric are little more than distractions from the actual causes and remedies to conflicts, and that religious factors which appear to be in play can be reduced to other factors” (Eastvold, 2006, p. 4). In the case of the terrorism in Saudi Arabia in particular, the *essentialist* analysis alone dominates the few studies

on the topic. Such an explanation treats religious extremism as a given constant, rather than a variable. This research will argue that essentialist explanations are incomplete. It argues that extremist transnational terrorism in general and terrorism in Saudi Arabia in particular cannot be understood by either an essentialist or reductionist explanation alone. Rather, it can best be understood through a contextual analysis that takes into account religious and external factors.

When explaining terrorism in Saudi Arabia, most scholars and analysts reduce social, structural, and external factors to only religious factors. For instance, MacFarquhar (2001), who examines the Saudi education system, explains violent extremism not as the result of the lack of education, but rather of extra doses of religious studies. He argues that “extremist, anti-Western world view has gradually pervaded the Saudi education system with its heavy doses of extremist religious instruction ... these anti-Western views aid Osama bin Laden or other extremists in finding recruits” (MacFarquhar, 2001). Others go further to argue that while religious terrorism comes from factions of religious fundamentalism around the world, in Saudi Arabia it is more pronounced because “it is official Islam that is fundamentalist, in that the country claims to be governed by the fundamentals of Islamic law” (Teitelbaum, 2000, p. xi).

The view of terrorism in Saudi Arabia as a manifestation of only extremist religiosity raises more questions than answers. First, it does not explain the long period of stability Saudi Arabia maintained in the midst of an unstable region from its establishment until 1979. Second, it does not explain why a small number of Saudis resort to violence but not others. Third, this argument does not account for the fact that terrorism in Saudi Arabia is perpetrated by extremist groups comprised of not only Saudi extremists, but also extremists from different Islamic countries. Furthermore, the religious-extremism explanation does not explain the timing of terrorist campaigns in Saudi Arabia. A brief look at the main terrorist campaigns in Saudi Arabia

reveals that terrorism in the Kingdom occurs in the aftermath of key regional political developments.

The religious extremism often associated with Saudi Arabia as an Islamic state is just one contribution to the dominant assumption that terrorism in Saudi Arabia is a direct result of extremist religiosity. Also reinforcing this assumption has more to do with what is *not* rather than what is. That is, terrorism in Saudi Arabia does not fit with other understandings of terrorism, so scholars and analysts are left seeking other explanations. For example, one conventional explanation for terrorism in general holds that it is a result of economic, political, or religious deprivations. However, terrorism in the Kingdom runs contrary to this notion in three ways. First, terrorism in Saudi Arabia coincided with the country's economic boom in the late 1970s. Second, terrorism in the Kingdom is committed by religious extremists despite the privileged status of religion in the country. Saudi Arabia recognizes the Quran as its constitution and *Sharia* as its judicial system, while the lack of enforcement of *Sharia* law is a common grievance of opposition Islamic groups in other countries. Third, the traditional monarchy government system such as the one of Saudi Arabia is deeply rooted in both the society and the history of Islamic political thought. Because terrorism in Saudi Arabia is not commensurate with economic, political, or religious deprivations, scholars and analysts are left with the extremist-religiosity explanation, an explanation that obscures not only the distinction between different religious terrorist campaigns in Saudi Arabia, but also our understanding of the complex phenomenon in general.

### **An Alternative Approach**

Taking the role of religious extremism into consideration, this dissertation underlines the importance of external factors on the mobilization of transnational terrorist groups throughout

the Islamic world and particularly in Saudi Arabia. It argues that religious extremist terrorism cannot be examined in isolation from the context of the developments that ignite it and revolutionize its doctrine.

Religious extremism, like any other type of extremism, has existed throughout history. It goes without saying that not all extremists, including religious extremists, are violent. Although some violent extremists can launch isolated terrorist attacks, they cannot sustain terrorist campaigns without popular mobilizations. Given the fact that religious extremist segments are always minorities among their societies, sustaining popular support for an extremist cause requires a radical shift to a new paradigm of popular perception. The determinant of the rise and fall of religious terrorism is not religious extremism, but rather the major events that shape popular perception.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the impact of momentous political developments on the evolution of terrorism in Saudi Arabia, a country that has been at the forefront of these developments. It seeks to unpack the complex dynamics of religious terrorism in the Kingdom, complexities that have largely been ignored in much of the literature.

The study attempts to answer the following questions: What is the role of key regional developments in the evolution of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia? What explains the transnationalism of religious terrorism in Saudi Arabia in contrast to religious terrorism in other Islamic countries? How much has the governmental response impacted the evolution and devolution of terrorism in Saudi Arabia?

## Methodology and Research Description

In order to trace the causal dynamics of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia, I conduct a within-case analysis of three cases which have been turning points in the stability of not only Saudi Arabia, but also the entire region:

- 1- The Iranian Revolution in 1979.
- 2- The Gulf War in 1990.
- 3- The Iraq War in 2003.

While in-depth focus allows for an unpacking of the complex dynamics of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia, within-case comparison of different events that occurred at different periods of time increases the explanatory power of the case study method used in this study. These cases were selected for a number of reasons. First, they exhibit considerable variation on the dependent variable. Although all these political developments destabilized the region and shifted the popular perception toward an increased need for security, terrorist acts that followed these events vary widely in their context, scope, and character. Second, these cases exhibit variation on explanatory variables such as the state's response and international military intervention. Finally, despite their variance, these cases provide insights into the interaction between religious and external factors during times of crisis.

In order to trace the complex dynamics of transnational terrorism during each case, I use process-tracing at two levels of analysis. At the *domestic level*, I will look at the complex and often misunderstood interaction of political, economic, social, and ideological forces that comprise the environment in which Saudi extremists function. Also at this level, I will examine the Saudi domestic institutional response to the transnational extremism phenomenon, a response that has strengthened some domestic institutions and created others.



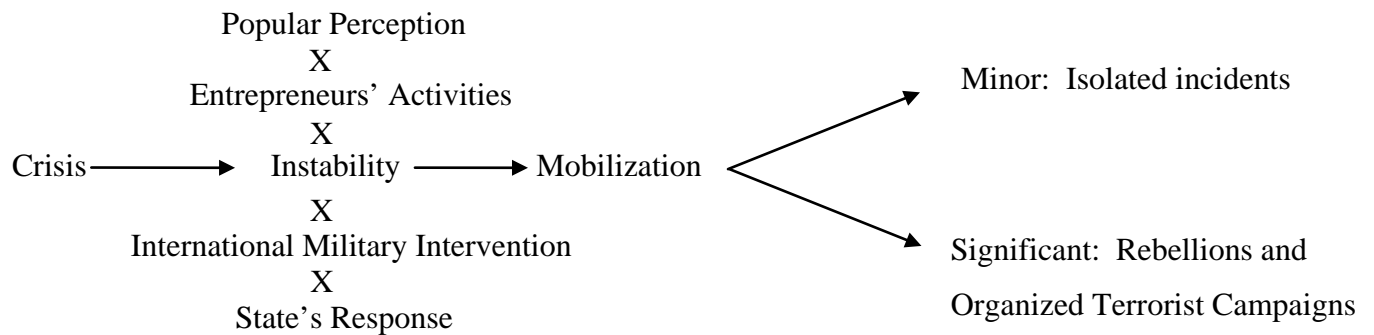
At the *regional level*, I will examine regional political developments and Islamic political ideologies concerning these developments. Regional developments have been turning points in the history of Islamic movements as well as triggers of new ones. Military coups, revolutions, and wars throughout the region have had transnational effects as they draw foreign fighters and exile others. Analyses at this level will be useful not only in mapping the shifting boundaries of extremist networks, but also in identifying where, when, and how extremist groups with different ideologies work together.

### ***Variables and Hypotheses***

In this study, I draw on the work of Jonathan Eastvold (2006) who developed a model that combines religious factors and external context in order to explain religious violence. To examine the impact of external political developments, I begin with crisis as the independent variable and include the activity of religious extremists during crisis times as a conditional variable. The instability that results from the recurring crises manifests itself with different types and levels of violence. I pay particular attention to the process of extremist mobilization in unstable environments. As shown in Figure 1, instability and mobilization are intervening or mediating variables that mediate the relationship between crisis (the independent variable) and terrorism (the dependent variable). I argue that the level of terrorism depends on the level of extremist mobilization during times of instability which is affected by a number of conditional variables:

- 1- Popular perception.
- 2- The activities of extremist political entrepreneurs.
- 3- International military intervention.
- 4- The state's response.

**Figure 1: Research design**



In order to answer the study's questions, I test five causal hypotheses against each one of the three cases. I begin with a core hypothesis and then I present four additional hypotheses that refine the core hypothesis:

**Core hypothesis (H1):** *Key regional political developments have a major impact on the mobilization for violence.*

**H2:** *The higher the level of the change in popular perception of insecurity, the more susceptible the public becomes to extremist mobilization.*

**H3:** *The more coherent the opposition's interpretation of the crisis, the more effective its mobilization efforts are.*

**H4:** *International military intervention increases the transnational mobilization for violence.*

**H5:** *Effective state's counterterrorism terrorism efforts, rather than the course of the crisis, shorten the duration of terrorist campaigns.*

### ***Dependent Variable***

The dependent variable in this study is transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of this study, terrorism is “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 40). Terrorism is transnational “when an incident in one country includes perpetrators, victims, institutions, governments, or citizens of another country” (Sandler, 2010, p. 896).

### ***Independent Variables***

In order to examine the impact of regional political development, this study begins with crisis as the independent variable. This is not to say that extremism is a direct result of crisis, but watershed events alter popular perception of insecurity and bring about ideological shifts which extremists galvanize into popular mobilization. However, not all political developments can trigger a radical change in popular perception. A watershed crisis that contributes to revolutionary mobilization is a momentous development that presents a unique threat-hope dynamic, and a real security threat to the state and the public. A watershed crisis sparks a new hope of extremists’ commitment to mobilize the agitated masses against their vulnerable state (Rapoport, 2004). Second, it challenges the old belief system and creates a change in the public’s perception “by introducing evidence that calls into question the existing interpretation” (Eastvold, 2006, p. 60). Despite the major role of crisis in destabilizing the state, crisis alone cannot result in terrorism in the absence of intervening and conditional variables.

## ***Intervening Variables***

### ***Instability***

Instability is the direct result of a major political event such as a war, a revolution, or an uprising. In a region like the Middle East, a shared historical, cultural, and religious background facilitates the spillover of political crises. The threat (and perceived threat) imposed by a watershed crisis can destabilize not only the country in turmoil, but also other countries based on their geopolitical positions. This threat can be defined “as any actor or state of affairs that calls a political actor’s interests into question. These threats may be material, ideological, economic, or environmental in their scope” (Eastvold, 2006). In this study, instability in Saudi Arabia does not mean the propensity of governmental change or collapse, but rather the social and political unrest that may result in different levels of violence.

### ***Mobilization***

Mobilization in this study is the revolutionary mobilization carried out by extremist opposition during times of crisis. This type of mobilization can be informal or formal. Informal mobilization occurs, as Jack Goldstone (2001) explains:

[W]hen individuals’ decisions to engage in protest actions are made not through communal organizations to which they have longstanding formal ties but instead through loosely connected networks based on personal friendship, shared workplace, or neighborhood. Such informal organization generally occurs in response to a crisis; neighborhoods or friends then mobilize themselves to take unconventional actions (p. 151).

Formal extremist mobilization occurs when a state seeks to mobilize groups of people based on their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation to commit terrorism in other countries. In the case of religious extremist mobilization in particular, both formal and informal mobilizations always transcend national borders. Whether sponsored by state or non-state actors, a transnational mobilization process can be defined as “the process by which political, economic, and ideological resources that are disperse across the international system are harnessed and consolidated by actors in the service of a political project” (Adamson, 2002, p. 3).

### ***Conditional Variables***

#### ***Popular Perception***

Popular perception is the public’s frame of reference within which people interpret the world based on their values, culture, established knowledge, and belief system. Perception varies not only from one person to another, but also from reality (Jervis, 1976). The shift in perception “occurs in the wake of a watershed event—that is, an event that convinces an individual that his or her satisficing understanding of a particular situation is out of line with actual realities” (Eastvold, 2006, p. 60). Following Robert Jervis (1976) and Jonathan Eastvold (2006), I argue that “perception matters.” I pay particular attention to the role of the change in popular perception of insecurity as the threshold needed for developing and maintain an extremist mobilization campaign.

Robert Jervis (1976) argues that “we can find both misperceptions that are common to diverse kinds of people and important differences in perceptions that can be explained without delving too deeply into individuals’ psychic” (p. 3). Jervis, however, acknowledges the difficulties of measuring perception and generalizing to other cases particularly if the case is atypical. In order to mitigate these problems, Jervis suggests first drawing on “cases about which

extensive evidence has been analyzed by historians who generally agree” (p. 7). Second, he points to the importance of noting “the existence of alternative historical explanations so the reader is at least alerted to the relevant dispute” (p. 7). Third, he suggests studying a number of cases from different historical periods during which misperception occurs with great frequency. Unlike Jervis’s study, which studies perception as an aspect of the political decision-making process, this study will use data from polls, demonstrations, and petitions to examine the change in popular perception of insecurity during key political developments.

### ***Extremist Political Entrepreneurs***

The role of extremist activists as political entrepreneurs is overlooked in the literature. In contrast to the conventional description of religious extremists as dogmatic closed-minded fanatics, a few scholars point to the fact that Islamic extremist activists of contemporary movements, in particular, are “university-educated intellectuals,” businessmen, and professionals with PhDs from Western universities (Denoeux, 2002). The political savvy extremists have played a major role in articulating the extremist message and manipulating regional crises in their favor. As Eastvold (2006) points out, the way one views a real event depends not only on his/her worldview, but also on the interpretation of the meaning of the crisis event. Thus, “the role of others in assessing the significance of key events plays a vital role in translating these events into an impetus action” (Eastvold, 2006, p. 59). This dissertation will highlight the role of political entrepreneurs and examine its impact on mobilization for terrorism.

### ***International Military Intervention***

Military intervention is operationally defined as “the movement of regular troops or forces (airborne, seaborne, shelling, etc.) of one country inside another, in the context of some political issue or dispute” (Pearson & Baumann, 1993, p. 1). Scholars have linked international

military intervention to the rise of terrorism by arguing that military intervention “generates the animosity around the world that leads to terrorism” (Eland, 2002, p. 20). This study examines cases that involve military intervention and one case that does not.

### ***State’s Response***

The State’s response constitutes the official reaction to internal and external threats. Depending on the nature of the threat, the state’s response ranges from pre-emptive actions, persuasion, and compromise, to institutional change. During a crisis involving both external and internal threats, during which public support becomes vital, crafting an appropriate state response is extremely difficult. This difficulty stems from the fact that the state must balance the trade-off between popular support and tough security measures.

### ***Data Collection and Limitations***

To answer this study’s questions, I use a multi-data collection, which includes interviews, document analysis, and observation. I have interviewed religious scholars and officials, as well as former extremists; additionally, I have analyzed memoirs and books recently published by a number of high-ranking Islamic extremists who have renounced violence or turned themselves in to authorities. Also, I use primary sources such as government documents and publications along with national achieves, newspapers, recordings, and videos to supplement the data.

Studying clandestine activities such as terrorism does not come without data-collection challenges, including obtaining classified documents and interviewing terrorists in custody. Another data collection challenge relates to internet reports purportedly written by extremists. It goes without saying that a major purpose of terrorist websites is propaganda, so information on such websites requires careful assessment of its authenticity and accuracy.

## **Case Justification and Significance**

Due to the Kingdom's economic and religious status, domestic terrorism has transnational features and global impact. The case of terrorism in Saudi Arabia allows for comparative analysis between different terrorist groups as well as between state-supported and non-state terrorism. Also, the two-level framework I employ in this study allows for detailed analysis of the impact of both micro-level as well as macro-level factors. The analysis of overlapping issues that this research addresses will contribute to research on transnational terrorism, religious violence, and counterterrorism policy-making.

Studying episodes of religious extremist terrorism that occurred during three different historical periods with different ideologies and strategies, this research will contribute to scholarly debate across a wide range of contemporary security issues. First, it contextualizes religious terrorism through an analysis of both the internal dynamics of religious extremist groups and the regional environments within which they function. Furthermore, this study provides a more nuanced explanation of the nature of this type of terrorism by going beyond the extremist-religiosity explanation that pervades the research on religious terrorism.

Second, this study contributes to the “new versus old terrorism” debate. The first episode in 1979, which presumably classifies as “old terrorism,” was perpetrated by a transnational group, even though transnationalism is held as a defining feature of “new terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the analysis of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia in particular allows for both exploring the internal dynamics of specific organizations and comparing different organizations

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<sup>1</sup> The violent episode that took place in Saudi Arabia in 1979 is classified as “old terrorism” based on the apocalyptic ideology of its perpetrators as oppose to the contemporary jihadi ideology.



during different periods of time. The Saudi case is instructive for what it reveals about when and how terrorists abandon terrorism.

In the policymaking arena, this project attempts to further the understanding of religious terrorism at both the domestic and international levels. Understanding the differences between groups that use religion for mobilization is essential for a successful counterterrorism strategy. Even extremist groups that frame their ideology in traditional Islamic terms have different strategies, a fact that calls for tailored counterstrategies. This study attempts to provide evidence that dispels the one-size-fits-all dogma and enables the deployment of resources to the areas that matter. Analysis of the Saudi case provides evidence of the role of governmental response in making terrorists abandon and denounce terrorism. Moreover, it sheds some light on the transnational dynamics of diasporas which have been principal targets for militant recruitment.

## **Outline of the Chapters**

The next Chapter reviews the theoretical framework of this analysis and attempts to situate the study within the broader terrorism studies literature. It pays special attention to the preconditions and precipitants of transnational terrorism and the role of major political developments as a vehicle for extremist mobilization. Chapter Three presents a historical background of Saudi Arabia. It describes the Saudi domestic structure and the complex interactions among its political, social, economic, and ideological forces. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six I examine the three case studies within which the two-level framework to test the research hypotheses is used. Chapter Seven concludes the discussion of the arguments raised throughout the study. It will assess the role of the key regional developments in the evolution of terrorism in Saudi Arabia and highlight remaining questions.

## **Chapter 2 - Theories of Terrorism**

The lack of a general theory of terrorism is striking, but not surprising given the lack of a common definition which is an essential component of theoretical explanations. Defining and theorizing terrorism are not easy undertakings due to the ambiguous nature of the act itself. As a leading scholar on terrorism puts it, “terrorism is an ambiguous variable not easily measured or quantified, in part because there are multiple forms of terrorism, and they are easily confused with other styles of violence” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 6). From an academic perspective, one of the unique characteristics of terrorism is that the phenomenon lies at the intersection of several disciplines. In recent years, scholars from disciplines ranging from political science, history, religion, sociology, to psychology have devoted significant attention to the study of terrorism. Their contributions cover a broad range of issues, from explaining the roots of terrorism to strategizing how to uproot it.

Although the voluminous literature on the study of terrorism transcends disciplines, some main approaches that combine cross-disciplinary insights have emerged. A common agreement among scholars is that terrorism is never caused by a single factor. Causes of terrorism, it has been argued, are many, complex, and unpredictable (Crenshaw, 1981; Cronin, 2004; Hoffman, 2006; McCormick, 2003). Distinctions can be made, however, between different sets of factors, different types of terrorism, and various settings in which it occurs. Charles Tilly (2004, p. 12) asserts that “terrorists range across a wide spectrum of organizations, circumstances, and beliefs.” Therefore, he suggests, social scientists “should doubt the existence of a distinct, coherent class of actors (terrorists) who specialize in a unitary form of political action (terror) and thus should establish a separate variety of politics (terrorism)” (p. 5).

Martha Crenshaw (1981), too, stresses the importance of distinguishing between different factors when analyzing terrorism. She argues that “a significant difference exists between *preconditions*; factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run, and *precipitants*, specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism” (p. 381). According to Crenshaw, both categories, *preconditions* and *precipitants*, have transnational dimensions, making it difficult to restrict them exclusively to a single nation-state. This distinction between *precondition* and *precipitant* factors provides an effective framework for analyzing the numerous causes of terrorism. In this chapter, I will use this framework to review the primary theoretical approaches within both categories in order to situate this study within the broader debate.

### **Preconditions**

Most of the literature on terrorism has been concerned more with the *preconditions* than the *precipitant* factors due to the fact that the former category includes a wide range of factors at the individual, organization, state, and international levels. In studies emphasizing *preconditions*, scholars are concerned with factors that lead individuals to terrorism, affect their individual and collective decisions, and enable them to commit and sustain spectacular acts. There is a common agreement among scholars that factors such as the rapid developments of media and communication technologies, transportations, and explosives have an enabling impact on the evolution of terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981; Hoffman, 2006; McCormick, 2003; Weinberg & Davis, 1989). However, scholars disagree on the factors that make individuals and organizations resort to terrorism.

### *Socioeconomic Deprivation*

The first school of thought in this category places more emphasis on structural factors such as political, social, economic, and education deprivations. According to Ted Gurr's (1970) theory of "relative deprivation," people resort to violence as a result of their perception of the discrepancy between the goods and conditions of life to which they "believe they are entitled" and what they "think they are capable of getting and keeping" (p. 24). Gurr incorporates psychological and social variables to find causal linkages between perceived deprivation, discontent, and collective violence. He finds that political violence is not "primarily a recourse of vicious, criminal, deviant, ignorant, or undersocialized people" (p. 357). Men, he concludes, "aspire to many other conditions of life than physical well-being, not the least of which are security, status, a sense of community, and the right to manage their own affairs" (p. 358).

Although Gurr includes the perception of economic deprivation among other variables in his analysis, he asserts that economic conditions alone do not necessarily cause discontent. However, many scholars and policymakers have viewed economic deprivations as the main sources of discontent, particularly in developing countries (Alesin, Ozle, Roubin, & Swage, 1996; Li & Schaub, 2004; Lieven, 2001). In his memoirs, President George W. Bush (2010, p. 336) writes: "Our national security was tied directly to human suffering. Societies mired in poverty and disease foster hopelessness. And hopelessness leaves people ripe for recruitment by terrorists and extremists."

The haves-and-haves-not argument has been echoed by some scholars who view contemporary terrorism as a result of anti-globalization sentiment (Mousseau, 2002-2003). Others take the globalization argument further and argue that terrorism is not only "a reaction to globalization but is facilitated by it" (Cronin, 2002-2003, p. 30). One problem with the

globalization argument is that it assumes a homogenously-materialistic world view. Religious and spiritually oriented people of most religions, for instance, find materialistic goods worthless. When analyzing globalization's effects, one must consider the variation in perceptions of globalization among people. As Brian Crozier (1960) suggests: "men do not necessarily rebel merely because their conditions of life are intolerable: it takes a rebel to rebel. Look at it another way: some men or groups of men will tolerate more than others. If one describes conditions of life as intolerable, one begs the question: "To whom?""

A number of studies have challenged the view of economic deprivation as a direct cause of terrorism (Krueger A. B., 2007; Krueger & Malecková, 2003). Crenshaw (2007) asserts that the fact that many contemporary terrorists are citizens of Western countries as well as of wealthy states such as Saudi Arabia indicates that "such individuals are the products of globalization, not those left behind" (p. 70). Similarly, Weinberg (2006) contends that if terrorism is a result of a sentiment against the beneficiaries of globalization, Japan, China, and Taiwan would be primary targets of today's terrorism, which is not the case.

Alan Krueger and Jitka Malecková (2003), who undertake a cross-country study of the determinants of participation in international terrorism, find a "little direct connection between poverty or education and participation in terrorism." Members of terrorist organizations, they argue, "are at least as likely to come from economically advantaged families and have a relatively high level of education as to come from the ranks of the economically disadvantaged and uneducated" (p. 141). Similarly, a study conducted at Georgetown University has broken new ground in debunking the socioeconomic conventional wisdom (Blair, Fair, Malhotra, & Shapiro, 2011). Using a 6000-person survey of Pakistani adults, the study reveals that "the poor in Pakistan hold militant groups in much lower regard than do middle-class Pakistanis,

challenging the conventional wisdom that expanding the size of the middle class via economic development will decrease violence” (p. 22). The study also finds that “the negative relationship between poverty and support for militancy is three times stronger in urban locations than in Pakistan as a whole” (p. 25).

The deprivation theory is powerful in explaining some types of political violence. However, its explanatory power is limited when it comes to explaining transnational terrorism. In a recent study, Ted Gurr (2006, p. 85), a preeminent proponent of the relative deprivation theory, states that “terrorism is a choice made by groups waging conflict, not a hard-wired response to deprivation or injustice.” The limitation of the deprivation theory in explaining the outbreak of terrorism especially in wealthy countries has given rise to a different explanation derived from repression theory. Proponents of this approach explain terrorism as a reaction to political repression rather than socioeconomic factors. For instance, Alberto Abadie (2006), who uses a worldwide dataset on terrorism risk, finds no relationship between terrorism and economic factors. However, his findings suggest that political freedom has an impact on terrorism in a non-monotonic way. Countries in transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies, he argues, are more prone to terrorism than full democracies or countries with authoritarian regimes.

### ***Repression Theory***

In his book *Why Muslims Rebel*, Mohammed Hafez (2003) criticizes the socioeconomic approach for ignoring the important link between individuals, grievances, and organized collective action. He argues that this approach does not sufficiently show how aggrieved groups can transform grievances into an organized recruitment, resource mobilization, and eventually a collective struggle. Instead, Hafez offers a political process approach to explain sustained violent oppositions in the Islamic world. His argument holds that “Muslims rebel because of an ill-fated

combination of institutional exclusion, on the one hand, and on the other, reactive and indiscriminate repression that threatens the organizational resources and personal lives of Islamists” (p. 21-22). While political repression can cause discontent, this argument does not explain the absence of violence in repressive countries, on the one hand, and the high level of terrorism in some democratic countries on the other.

The literature on political repression has mixed findings regarding the relationship between repression and collective violence (Khawaja, 1993; Rasler, 1996; Snyder & Tilly, 1972; White, 1989). When it comes to explaining terrorism in particular, the type of political system does not seem to be a determinant factor. Empirical studies have shown that democracies are more susceptible to terrorism than non-democracies (Weinberg, 2006). Eubank and Weinberg (1994) argue that democratic societies are more likely to host terrorist groups than societies under authoritarian regimes. This is in line with the fact that democratic countries like the United Kingdom, Italy, India, and Spain have been homes to a number of entrenched terrorist organizations while Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, for instance, was almost a terrorism-free country despite the high level of political repression.

### ***Psychological Theory***

One of the most prominent approaches to the study of terrorism is the psychological approach. This approach is concerned with studying the psychologies of individual terrorists, organizations, and societies. Within this approach, one can identify three main schools of thought. The first represents the view that terrorists are emotionally unstable, psychopathic, and crazed fanatics (Cooper, 1977; Pearce, 1977; Taylor, 1988). Recent studies, however, have discredited this argument, maintaining that terrorists are not psychologically abnormal (Crenshaw, 1992; Cronin, 2004). Charles Ruby’s (2002) review of the psychological theories of

terrorism, for instance, “concludes that terrorists are not dysfunctional or pathological; rather, it suggests that terrorism is basically another form of politically motivated violence that is perpetrated by rational, lucid people who have valid motives” (p. 15).

The other two schools of thought are concerned with whether terrorism is a result of collective psychological forces or strategic choice. The proponents of the collective psychological explanation acknowledge the fact that terrorists are not psychotic individuals and argue that individual psychological explanations are insufficient in explaining terrorism (Post, 2006). Instead, proponents of this approach put much emphasis on collective identity and the psychology of the group as the determinant of the individual’s behavior. Jerrold Post (2006) asserts that “terrorists subordinate their individual identity to the collective identity so that what serves the group, organization, or network is of primary importance” (p. 18). The logic of terrorists, Post (1998) argues, is grounded in their psychology of “us versus them” which rationalizes and justifies their acts of violence.

In contrast, proponents of the strategic choice explanation explain terrorism as a result of a rational, calculated, and strategic decision (Crenshaw, 1992; 1998; 2000; DeNardo, 1985). Martha Crenshaw (1998) contends that terrorism, although radical, can follow an internal strategic logic. She argues that “it is critical to include strategic reasoning as possible motivation, at a minimum as an antidote to stereotypes of ‘terrorists’ as irrational fanatics. Such stereotypes are a dangerous underestimation of the capabilities of extremist groups. Nor does stereotyping serve to educate the public – or, indeed, specialists – about the complexities of terrorist motivations and behaviors” (p. 24).

One of the most complex terrorist behaviors is suicide terrorism. Although it is always considered a religious-driven behavior, some scholars point out to a different strategic reasoning



behind suicide terrorism (Pape, 2003). In a study of worldwide suicide terrorist attacks from 1980 to 2001, Robert Pape (2003) shows that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, a secular organization with Marxist/Leninist ideology, is the world leading terrorist organization in suicide terrorism. Pape (2003) argues that “the ferocious escalation of the pace of suicide terrorism that we have witnessed in the past several years cannot be considered irrational or even surprising. Rather, it is simply the result of the lesson that terrorists have quite reasonably learned from their experience of the previous two decades: Suicide terrorism pays” (p. 355).

Mark Juergensmeyer (2000) who studies different religious terrorist organizations agrees that religious terrorist groups deliberately construct their attacks; however, he does not “use the term *strategy* for all rationales for terrorist actions” (p. 123). Some religious terrorist acts, he argues, have an internal rationale such as taking hostages to demand the release of political prisoners, while others are more symbolic and commit exaggerated violence with “less tangible goals.” Juergensmeyer, therefore, locates religious terrorism between strategic and symbolic lines. Although understanding the logic of religious extremists is important, the most important question concerning religious violence is whether or not religion is the primary force driving violent extremists.

### ***Religious Terrorism***

Scholars agree that religion and violence have an ancient relationship; however, they disagree on the specific role of religion in motivating and sanctioning violence (Hoffman, 2006; Juergensmeyer, 2000; Rapoport, 1984). While some scholars view religion as a victim of political activists who misuse it to achieve their political ends, others consider religion inherently violent. Jessica Stern (2003), for instance, contends that religion in general is supposed to make people loving. According to Stern, religious terrorists view their violence as a tool to purify the

world of injustice. However, this messianic intention, she argues, “can end up as greed – for money, political power, or attention” (p. 282). In contrary, Sam Harris (2004) argues that people act based on their beliefs. “In the best case”, he states, “faith leaves otherwise well-intentioned people incapable of thinking rationally about many of their deepest concerns; at worst, it is a continuous source of human violence” (p. 223).

A third school of thought tries to bridge the wide gap between optimistic and pessimistic views of religion by arguing that religion is not the problem, but it is problematic when it is involved in conflicts (Juergensmeyer, 2006). Jonathan Eastvold (2006) who studies violent extremism during times of crisis asserts that “an actor’s extremism is directly proportional to the perceived level of threat to its core interests, and that it varies in curvilinear fashion with respect to perceived relative power” (p. 63). Like other scholars within this camp, Eastvold stresses that religious ideology and language, although they are not the main source of conflict, have a major influence on people during times of crisis.

“Religious language,” Mark Juergensmeyer (1988) argues “contains images both of grave disorder and tranquil order, and often holds out the hope that despite appearances to the contrary, order eventually will triumph, and disorder will be contained” (p. 178). Although religion preaches a message of order and discipline, one must distinguish, as John Esposito (1999) puts it, “between the beliefs and activities of the majority ... and a minority of extremists who justify their aggression and violence in the name of religion, ethnicity, or political ideology” (p. xvii). In the same vein, David Rapoport (1984) asserts that “modern terrorist organizations (especially the most durable and effective ones) are often associated with religious groups, for religion can be a major factor of ethnic identity” (p. 674). In the age of transnational networks in particular, the

transnational nature of religious messages facilitates transnational mobilization that transcends ethnic and national boundaries.

Scholars in this camp acknowledge the fact that extremists misuse religion, however, they point out to the role of religion in mobilization during conflict. Juergensmeyer (2006) explains the powerful aspects which religion brings to conflict:

For one thing, religion personalizes the conflict. It provides personal rewards – for example, religious merit, redemption or the promise of heavenly luxuries – to those who struggle in conflicts that otherwise have only social benefits. It also provides vehicles of social mobilization that embrace vast numbers of supporters who otherwise would not be mobilized around social or political issues. In many cases, it provides an organizational network of local churches, mosques, temples, and religious associations into which patterns of leadership and support may be tapped. It gives the legitimacy of moral justification for political encounter (p. 142).

In addition to the mobilizing effect of religion, some scholars within this school of thought point to the aura of divine influence and the holy power of religion on extremists' behavior. "For the religious terrorist," Hoffman (2006) writes, "violence is first and foremost a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theoretical demand or imperative" (p. 88). Similarly, Rapoport (1989) observes that violence is always expected from religious groups that radically believe in their messianic duty. He states that:

In the major revealed religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) terror is often a particular outgrowth of Messianic or millenarian visions, of the belief that the Messiah can annul God's law or existing restraints in order to fulfill the meaning

of history, or God's intention for man. Messianic expectations erupted periodically, and it would seem that as long as the religious traditions that make Messianism conceivable prevail, an outburst is always possible (p. xv).

Although some incidents of religious terrorism have vividly demonstrated these insights, most modern religious terrorism is driven by political and ethnic ideologies rather than messianic vision. Most notorious terrorist organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Hezbollah, and Al-Qaeda owe their existence to specific political developments not only to sudden messianic outbursts. This is not to say radical religious ideologies are irrelevant, but religious extremists need enabling conditions in order to enact their extremist ideology.

Some scholars note that religious terrorists, like other terrorists, need enabling conditions in order to mobilize support. "Militant Islamist movements" Martha Crenshaw (2001) argues, "could not have emerged in the absence of social and political conditions that leave many Muslims desperate and aggrieved" (p. 429). This observation is supported by David Rapoport (2004), who categorizes terrorism historically in four international waves: Anarchic wave, anti-colonial wave, New Left wave and the religious wave. Rapoport asserts that each wave is driven by "different energy" and new "international ingredients." Islam, he argues, is at the heart of the religious wave, in part, because the political events that facilitated the wave took place in the Islamic world. "Three events in the Islamic world," he explains, "provided the hope or dramatic political turning point that was vital to launch the fourth wave. In 1979 the Iranian Revolution occurred, a new Islamic century began, and the Soviets made an unprovoked invasion of Afghanistan" (p. 61). These events and the developments that followed are not only precipitants that triggered terrorist campaigns, but rather each development acted as a stage of the overall evolution of today's religious terrorism.

## Precipitants

Precipitants that lead to terrorism can be defined as “specific events that precede and indeed stimulate the use of terrorism” (Weinberg & Davis, 1989, p. 39). These events range from repressive police crackdowns to the breakouts of revolutions or wars. The way the French and British governments treated the anarchists and the Easter Rising, it has been argued, was a factor in subsequent terrorist campaigns (Crenshaw, 1981). Similarly, a number of scholars argue that the Vietnam War has stimulated the wave of New Left terrorism (Rapoport, 2004; Weinberg & Davis, 1989). Weinberg and Davis (1989) attribute the impact of Vietnam War to three main causes, which are instructive for analyzing the impact of war on the rise of terrorism:

First, the Viet Cong showed the vulnerability of the American superpower to methods of unconventional warfare. Second, the fact that the Viet Cong had committed a wave of assassinations against local representatives of the Saigon regime...led revolutionary observers elsewhere to believe that terrorism was a necessary first step in the escalation of a war of long duration against their nation's rulers...Third, the mass media-transmitted accounts of atrocities committed by American forces and their South Vietnamese allies against the civilian population did little to endear the United States or its NATO allies to the anti-Vietnam opposition movements they confronted at home (p. 47-48).

Like the Vietnam War, each of the developments that occurred in the Islamic world since 1979 has contributed to the evolution of the wave of religious terrorism. However, one should consider the recurring cycle of conflict in the region. While the Vietnam War lasted almost twenty years, the Islamic world has witnessed more than ten conflicts within the same timeframe (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010). In addition to showing the vulnerability of state systems, each

regional development has added new ingredients and radical hopes for a religious extremist revival. Despite the recurring dynamics and powerful effects of these conflicts, scholars have overlooked their impact on subsequent religious terrorism and focused on extremist religiosity instead. The fact that religion is not the mere source of all these conflicts raises the question of whether the recurring cycle of conflict contributes to the salience of religious extremism in the region.

### **This Study and the Discipline**

It is in recognition of this fatal concoction of radical hope, threat, and conflict that this dissertation will examine the impact of regional momentous developments on the evolution of transnational terrorism in Saudi Arabia, a country that has been at the forefront of these developments. The impact of watershed events that occurred in the Islamic world varies from one country to another based on the country's position within the regional and international communities. Being the birthplace of Islam and the host of the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia occupies not only a special religious status, but also a historical status within the Islamic world. This status coupled with Saudi Arabia's position in the global economy places the Kingdom in the crosshairs of every major regional development. When analyzing transnational terrorism in particular, a country's position within the international community is a critical component.

Theories that attribute terrorism to socioeconomic deprivations, repression, or psychological factors have contributed tremendously to understanding the dynamics of some types of terrorism. However, they have limited explanatory power in explaining transnational terrorism that transcends borders of economic zones, cultures, ethnicities, and nation states. Analysis of religious terrorism, in particular, is always overshadowed by the widely accepted dogma that extremist religiosity is the only driving force behind this type of terrorism. However,

a brief look at the history of religious terrorism around the world reveals that secular societies and states suffer as much from religious terrorism as the states that institute religious laws do (Hoffman, 2006). In religious and secular states alike, the rise and fall of religious terrorist campaigns have been conditioned mostly by the context of political developments rather than the status of religion within their borders.

In the literature on terrorism in Saudi Arabia in particular, scholars and analysts overlook the regional and international position of Saudi Arabia with regard to key regional developments and focus on religious extremism instead. This is in part due to the unambiguous status of religion in Saudi Arabia coupled with the fact that terrorism in the Kingdom does not conform to socioeconomic explanations of terrorism. However, this broad-brush approach does not capture the complexity of transnational religious terrorism. John Esposito (1995) describes this tendency in studies of religious extremism as an easy stereotyping that scholars must resist. The more difficult path for contribution, he argues, “is to move beyond facile stereotypes and ready-made images and answers” (p. 190).

Despite the overemphasis on religious extremism in the studies on terrorism in Saudi Arabia, the impact of regional developments on the Saudi religious thought has not received its due attention. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the dynamics of violent extremism in Saudi Arabia had escaped rigorous scholarly attention due to a number of reasons. The first of which is the relatively long period of stability Saudi Arabia enjoyed coupled with the absence of an organized violent religious movement in the Kingdom like the ones in other Islamic countries. Second, Western social scientists had not have either the interest or the access to data on security issues in Saudi Arabia before 2001 (Hegghammer, 2010).

Suddenly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks—the perpetrators of which included fifteen Saudi citizens—Saudi Arabia came under an unprecedented spotlight. The large amount of literature that has been written about Saudi Arabia post-9/11 surpasses what had been written about it since its establishment. Unfortunately, due to the tense security situation and the short time span during which it was written, most of this literature lacks deep empirical insights. A common thread that runs through this literature is the proposition that the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia, the so-called *Wahhabism*, is inherently violent. Dore Gold (2003), for instance, portrays *Wahhabism* as an “ideology of hatred” that is bent to create a global terror network. He goes further to argue that “militant Islamic movements traced their intellectual and ideological roots to nineteenth-century Wahhabism” (p. 40). This facile generalization does not help in understanding the complex phenomenon of religious terrorism. In the Saudi case in particular, it does not account for the absence of an organized religious militancy in Saudi Arabia from its establishment until 1979, while the region was embroiled in religious conflicts. Moreover, this view does not explain the timing of terrorist campaigns as well as the diversity of extremist ideologies among terrorist organizations in the region.

In contrast to the mainstream literature, Thomas Hegghammer (2010) argues that “it is not fruitful to look at the relationship between Wahhabism and contemporary militancy as a causal one. Wahhabism ... is not a political doctrine, but a living theological tradition, interpreted and contested by successive generations of scholars” (p. 5). In answer to the study’s main question of why the Al-Qaeda’s campaign in Saudi Arabia broke out in 2003 and not before, Hegghammer argues that “revolutionary Islamism and global jihadism have never thrived in the kingdom and that the 2003 violence was due to the sudden and massive influx of global jihadists from Afghanistan in 2002.” He attributes the post-Afghan-jihad violence to the



“fundamental transformation of al-Qaida’s strategic environment after the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001” (p. 227). Although the Afghan jihad was one of the turning points in religious militancy all over the Islamic world, terrorism had struck the Kingdom even before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. By starting his analyses from the Afghan jihad, Hegghammer misses an important phase of terrorism in Saudi Arabia during which the country witnessed the first incident of the contemporary wave of religious terrorism in the region. Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia like other countries in the region witnessed a number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Sunni and Shiite extremists alike who do not espouse a jihad ideology. Despite the rigorous design and the extensive fieldwork upon which it rests, the fact that Hegghammer’s study centers primarily upon the contemporary jihad movement makes it fall short of a comprehensive analysis of religious violence in Saudi Arabia.

This dissertation seeks to examine the evolution of transnational religious terrorism in Saudi Arabia in the context of the focal political developments that ignited it. It investigates the impact of watershed events on politico-religious thought in the region in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. In the Middle East, where politics and religion intertwine, religious violence cannot be understood in isolation from the political context within which it evolves. The next chapter will describe the complex interaction between political, social, and religious forces in Saudi Arabia in the context of a changing environment.

## **Chapter 3 - The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Society, Religion, and Politics**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a young state in an ancient land. Its modern government structure is built upon ancient religious concepts such as *ijmaa* (consensus) and *shura* (consultation). The interaction among historical, social, economic, political, and religious forces that shaped the Kingdom is often misunderstood and reduced to a single unit: religion. It is hard to find a study on the contemporary Saudi Arabia that does not essentialize the Kingdom as the result of the 1744 alliance between the religious reformer Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab and Mohammad Ibn Saud. Although that alliance led to the creation of Saudi Arabia, it does not reflect the structure of the contemporary Saudi state that was established in 1932. As two scholars observe, “prior to the twentieth century, Saudi Arabia was one of the most conservative, traditional Islamic countries on earth. Since then, it has seen more social, economic, and political change than most western countries have experienced since the Renaissance” (Long & Maisel, 2010, p. 168). Although based on religious values, the Saudi government structure is not run by a religious or any other single entity. Since the establishment of the contemporary state, the relationship between the ulama (religious scholars) and the government in Saudi Arabia has not been an abstract one. Rather, it is a dynamic relationship that attempts to strike a balance between principles and pragmatism.

This chapter tracks the formation of the contemporary Saudi Arabian state in the local and international context in order to examine the social, political, and religious dynamics in the Kingdom. Before proceeding into the details of the state’s structure, it is important to situate the Wahhabi reform movement in its historical and social contexts.

## Wahhabism

In the eighteenth century, almost isolated from the rest of the world, *Najd*, the central part of the Arabian Peninsula, became a ground of warring tribes, and Islam was replaced with tribal and customary law, superstition practices, and the worship of stones, trees, and graves (Habib, 1978). It was in this context that Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792) called for the return to the fundamentals of Islam and the elimination of *shirk* (the association of anyone or anything with God). He centered his call on two main principles: *Altawhid*, the oneness of God, and that the Quran and *Sunnah* (deeds and sayings of the Prophet) are the only sources of the Islamic law. When he started preaching his ideas, Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab did not start by building the ranks of an organized movement. Rather, he embarked on a mission he believed every preacher should dedicate his life to: the *dawah*, the call to return to the origins of the faith.

Like other religions, Muslims believe in the revival and renewal of religion. In Muslim tradition, there are two notions of religious revival: one that would be initiated by the *Mahdi*, the divinely guided leader, and one initiated by reformers. Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab was of the latter tradition (Voll, 2009).<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the leaders of some Islamic movements who use their charismatic personalities to claim that they were blessed by a divine spirit, Ibn Abdul Wahhab “embraced *tawhid* as his guiding message, rather than calling on his followers to rely on his personal qualities. He urged them to follow *tawhid*, his unitarian message” (Warburg, 2009, p. 662). Therefore, followers of the *tawhid* movement refer to themselves as *muwahidun*, unitarians rather than Wahhabists, a term coined by their Ottoman-Egyptian opponents (Commins, 2006; Warburg, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> The *Mahdi's* appearance is a controversial concept. Although most Muslim traditions believe in the concept in general, every tradition has its own version. Throughout the history of the Islamic world, a number of religious activists have claimed to be the awaited *Mahdi* for different reasons.

A key factor of the *muwahidun* movement's success was the fact that the movement's simple message called for desperately needed social reform. Its central doctrine of unity found resonance among the warring tribes and fragmented towns. In addition to holding people to a higher moral standard, the movement called for regulating the relationship among the wealthy, poor, powerful, and powerless (Vassiliev, 2000). Furthermore, the unity-oriented message, which treats messianic leadership with much reservation "was more likely to spread beyond the territorial boundaries of the Arabia Peninsula" (Warburg, 2009). However, the fact that Wahhabism casts doubt on the beliefs of some other Islamic traditions rendered it a target for existing Islamic movements. Like other new reform movements, the *muwahidun* movement witnessed fierce opposition from some Ottoman-affiliated religious scholars to the extent that they condemned it as a stray movement (Commins, 2009).

Like their religious scholars, local leaders under the Ottoman realm distanced themselves from Ibn Abdul Wahhab's movement, with the exception of the emir of a small town, Mohammed Ibn Saud. Ibn Abdul Wahhab's need for an authority's protection to preach his message and Ibn Saud's interest in the popular momentum of the movement led them to forge an alliance that expanded the small emirate (Vassiliev, 2000). Two particular tenets of the Wahhabi teaching were instrumental to the success of the emirate. First, the *muwahidun* movement imposes a strict conservative individual behavior and social discipline that facilitate the function of the state. The role of the movement in that context, in turn, led to less violent crime, economic prosperity, and stability (Wahba, 1935). Second, Wahabbism restricts the declaration of holy war, *jihad*, to the head of state rather than individuals, groups, or tribes.

By 1806, this union produced the first Saudi state that controlled most of the Arabian Peninsula including the holy cities of Makkah and Medina. Enraged by the loss of the Two Holy

cities, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Salim III, ordered his viceroy in Cairo, Mohammad Ali, to recapture Makkah and Medina and destroy the *muwahhidun* movement. In 1818, after capturing the Two Holy cities, Mohammad Ali's expeditionary force entered the Saudi capital city, Aldiriyah, slaughtering its inhabitants and burning the city to the ground. The head of the Saudi state, a number of his family, and a number of the ulama were taken hostage to be executed later in Cairo and Istanbul (Habib, 1978; Vassiliev, 2000; Weston, 2008). The Wahhabi movement and the Saudi state were destroyed, and most of the Arabian Peninsula was back under the Ottoman control for another century.

The emergence of Ibn Abdul Wahhab's movement should be understood in the context of a religious reform movement that rose and fell in a specific environment. Evaluating the theological tradition of the movement is beyond the scope of this study, but what is pertinent is the context and circumstances within which the movement emerged. One cannot explain contemporary events based on the circumstances that led to the Wahhabi movement's rise in the eighteenth century. Even within the Saudi state, which rose and fell once again before the establishment of the contemporary state, the role and impact of Wahhabism as a religious tradition have changed overtime. As Ayoob and Kosebalaban (2009) describe it, "Wahhabism is no monolith and has evolved and fractured over time as a result of its interaction with wider social, economic, and political conditions in the kingdom as well as with political and ideological trends in the broader Middle East" (p. 3). The resilience of Wahhabism compared to other religious movements is attributed to not only its ability to adapt to new realities, but also and more importantly, to the foundations and structure of the contemporary Saudi state.

## **The Formation of the Contemporary Saudi State**

After the fall of the first Saudi state, Turki Ibn Abdullah Ibn Saud escaped his prison in Egypt and led a rebellion to form the second Saudi state in 1824. Although the second Saudi state, which controlled only the central part of the Arabian Peninsula, enjoyed stability and prosperity, it disintegrated in 1891 due to a power struggle within the ruling family and shifting alliances among the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula (Vassiliev, 2000; Weston, 2008). The shifting alliance inside the Arabian Peninsula, however, was not only an internal affair, but also a result of the ever-increasing intervention of the Great Powers. Alexei Vassiliev (2000) notes that:

The history of the first and second Saudi states has demonstrated the interweaving of Arabia's destiny with general developments in the region. The future of state formations in Arabia was determined not only by the balance of forces in the desert: it was sometimes influenced to a greater extent by the decisions taken in London, Istanbul, Cairo, Berlin, St Petersburg and Paris (p. 206).

In 1902, when Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, embarked on his mission to restore his ancestors' homeland, the local, regional, and international environments were completely different from the environments within which the first and second Saudi states emerged. First, the religious fervor that infused the Wahhabi reform movement and the formation of the first Saudi state in the eighteenth century had dissipated. Second, there was an increasing tension between emerging world powers and the existing empires over control and resources, a tension that culminated into the First World War.

Abdul Aziz began his endeavor with a daring raid on his ancestors' capital, Riyadh. With a group of only forty men, his relatives and loyal tribal and townsmen, he was able to capture

Riyadh in one of the most heroic episodes of Arabian Peninsula's modern history. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Harold Dickson (1956), the British political agent in the Persian Gulf, "the story of Abdul Aziz's seizure of the great fort in the center of the town sounds almost like a fairy tale and shows better than anything else the character of that extraordinary man" (p. 138). The Riyadh operation earned Abdul Aziz strength and a heroic reputation that take precedence over anything in the life of tribesmen. The victory against Ibn Rashid, a powerful tribal chief backed by the Ottoman Empire, elevated the status of Abdul Aziz throughout the region. As a result, a number of Arabian tribes forged an allegiance with him to unite most of the Arabian Peninsula.

Early in the twentieth century, most of the Arabian Peninsula was divided among warring tribes that had nothing in common but their religion, Islam. Based on his knowledge of Islam and the nature of the Arabian Peninsula's inhabitants, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud envisioned the Islamic *Aqeedah*, creed, as the only creed that could unite fragmented tribes against popular movements such as nationalism and communism. Without a uniting creed, it was impossible to break the *asabiyah*, solidarity within the one tribe, and bring the warring tribes together for the sake of one cause and common goal. As Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal said, "you cannot bring ready-made solutions to a country that's completely different ... You must develop a system to achieve good governance that is adaptable to conditions in Saudi Arabia and to the requirements of Saudi citizens" (Frontline Interview with Prince Saud Al-Faisal, 2004). Since he started his endeavor to establish the Kingdom, King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud embraced the *tawhid* message which was an indigenous ideology that succeeded in uniting the Arabian Peninsula several times since the birth of Islam. In his speech on May 11, 1929, King Abdul Aziz declared:

They called us Wahhabists and our tradition Wahhabism as if Wahhabism were an invented sect. This is an obscene error which has been created by

propagandists. We do not have a new religious doctrine or creed and Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab did not come up with something new. Our creed is the creed of pious predecessors which was revealed in the Book of God, his Prophet's saying and deeds, and followed by the pious predecessors (The Speech of His Majesty King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, 1929).

### ***The Structure of the Saudi Government***

In contrast to the first Saudi state that benefited from the success of the religious reform movement, King Abdul Aziz introduced a modern government structure that gives the chance to the ulama, among others, to participate in modern nation building. The structure of the contemporary Saudi state put much emphasis on the Islamic concepts of *ijmaa* (consensus) and *shura* (counseling). An elected *Shura* Council and a Council of Deputies which were similar to the Western legislative branch were established in Hejaz in 1924 (Asshura, 1999; Saied, 2011). In his address to the first national *shura* council, King Abdul Aziz declared:

Every country needs a law that organizes its affairs, and the absence of such law will surely lead to undesired results. This law can only be executed by qualified men, religiously and nationally. Therefore, I urge you to elect in your council the perfect members who will look into the entire nation's affairs. The election must be documented by the signatures of these members in the Council. Their duty is to consider and suggest whatever they believe would entertain the welfare of the country and its people (Royal Speeches, 1924).

King Abdul Aziz based the basic structure of his government on a modern system of government, which includes three main authorities: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. In 1926, he issued an important document called *Altalemat Alasasyah*, the Basic Instructions, which set



out how the three authorities should operate. According to the Basic Instructions, the executive authority was vested in the King, the judicial authority was granted to the ulama, and the legislative authority was granted to the Shura Council (the Consultative National Council), which consisted of businessmen, religious scholars, and members of the general public. This was followed by a royal decree in 1931 reforming the government system by establishing the Deputy Council as the executive authority under the King (Saati, 1999). In 1992, King Fahad issued a decree that instituted many reforms but kept the Kingdom's basic structure of government. The 1992 Saudi Basic Law for the System of Government, which is equivalent to the constitution, states that:

The Authorities of the State consist of:

- The Judicial Authority [Religious Scholars]
- The Executive Authority [the King]
- The Regulatory Authority [Legislative authority which consists of the Council of Ministers and the Shura Council]

These authorities will cooperate in the performance of their functions, according to this Law or other laws. The King is the ultimate arbiter for these Authorities (The Basic Law for the System of Government, 1992).

Although this system of government grants absolute authority to the ruler, it states that his government “derives its authority from the Book of God and the Sunna of the Prophet (PBUH), which are the ultimate sources of reference for this Law and the other laws of the State” (The Basic Law for the System of Government, 1992). The legitimacy of the government, therefore, is not derived from religious scholars, but rather from the fact that the government rules the country

within *shariah*, a framework that is above the King, the ulama, and the people. David Long and Sebastian Maisel (2010) explain the Saudi political system from a Western perspective:

An often heard declaration in the West that because Saudi Arabia does not have a democratic system it is an absolute monarchy is not correct. Islamic law is supreme in Saudi Arabia, and the idea of the divine right of kings, used to justify absolute monarchies in Christian Europe, would be considered heresy. All litigation in the kingdom must be conducted in accordance with the Shari'a. No one, including the ruler, is above the law, and technically he can be sued for a breach of law in a special court known as the Diwan al-Mazalim (Board of Grievances) (p. 115).

The supremacy of religion, however, is not exclusive to Saudi Arabia. In most Islamic Sunni traditions, unlike in Shi'ite traditions, there is no attribution of divine or messianic qualities to an individual, no hierarchy in the clergy, and nobody (including ulama and rulers) is infallible. In Saudi Arabia in particular, religion is the center of gravity around which the society, ulama, and the state balance and orient themselves. Being under one supreme law, the three authorities of the Saudi state, although flexibly separated in functions and responsibilities, are mutually independent and integrated.

### ***The Role of the Ulama***

Within the Saudi judicial system, the religious scholars are an independent authority. The Basic Law for the System of Government states that "the decisions of judges shall not be subject to any authority other than the authority of the Islamic Sharia" (The Basic Law for the System of Government, 1992). However, the law regulates the authority of the ulama and determines their rights and responsibilities in interacting with the regulatory and executive authorities. Isam Ibn

Saied, the chief of the Bureau of Experts at the Saudi Council of Ministers, asserts that the King of Saudi Arabia has two main responsibilities: safeguarding the state's sovereignty and carrying out the daily administration of the state. The first responsibility, he states, is political in nature and requires more independence from the other branches of government. Therefore, the King has the absolute control over the political decision. However, his administrative responsibility, which is concerned with the daily life of the citizens and the application of laws and regulations, is subject to the review of the judicial and legislative authorities (Saied, 2011).

Although they present the ruler with religious advice, the ulama do not intervene in the ruler's political decisions. For instance, when a hardliner Saudi preacher was asked about the strong alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States, his answer was that this political matter "concerns the rulers who signed this alliance. It is not in my prerogative to discuss it, as I am neither a member of the ministry nor a chief in the government" (Frontline Interview with Sheihk Nasser Al-Omar, 2004). Although some Islamic thinkers criticize Wahhabism as an ideology that imposes submission to the rulers, the notion of granting the executive power to the ruler is not alien to Islam (Al-Zunidi, 2005). Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Chairman of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, contends that this notion is rooted in Islamic political thought. He asserts that:

From the first caliphs, the secular rulers have always been the executive rulers in Islamic history – the ultimate boss. It has been their job to exercise the power, while the job of the religious men – the sheikhs and mufti – has been to give them advice. *Never to govern* (as quoted in Lacey, 2009, p. 235).

As a result of the judicial authority's function in the government system, the power of Saudi religious scholars resides in the social rather than the political sphere. Given the fact that

Islam is a cosmic daily-life system, a majority of Saudis seek the guidance of the ulama on how they apply Islam to their daily lives. The status of the ulama, therefore, is derived from their knowledge of Islamic law rather than their governmental authority. Prince Saud Al-Faisal explains the official view of the ulama's authority by stating that their power "is not a political power or even a spiritual power ... But if there is an influence that exists for the ulama, it is from the belief and religiousness of the people and their seeking to always follow the proper Islamic role" (Frontline Interview with Prince Saud Al-Faisal, 2004). These dynamics coupled with the conservative traditional culture of the Saudi society have produced a conservative religious society.

Conservatism, however, does not mean violent extremism. It also goes without saying that extremist views do not always lead to violence. Throughout the modern history of Saudi Arabia, none of the leading Saudi ulama ever led, motivated, or sanctioned violence in the Kingdom or abroad. Since the early stages of the establishment of the Kingdom, Saudi ulama have had a strong position against violent extremism (Frontline Interview with Sheikh Saleh Al-Asheikh, 2004; Vassiliev, 2000; Weston, 2008). Their position against the revolt of the extremist tribal-religious movement, *Ikhwan*, which developed during the formation of the Kingdom, was an early indication of their position against extremism.<sup>3</sup> The *Ikhwan* rebelled against King Abdul Aziz in objection to his policies of forging international agreements and introducing modern technology. Given the fact that these policies do not contradict with Islamic principles, the ulama condemned the *Ikhwan's* rebellion. After exhausting all other means, King Abdul Aziz led a military campaign against the *Ikhwan* and destroyed the movement.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the Ikhwan movement, see John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam*, Leiden, 1978; Hafedh Wehbah, *Arabian Peninsula in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Cairo, 1935.

Since the establishment of the contemporary Saudi state, the ulama have been trying to strike a balance between the state's modernization policies and the traditional religious heritage. In most cases, they have succeeded in either convincing the society to embrace new realities or getting the government's concession to religious guidance. However, with the change in the economic conditions comes an inevitable change in the social structure and the educational system, change to which the Saudi religious community is not immune.

### **Domestic Environment**

The *Ikhwan* movement was the first challenge to the new Saudi state due to the fact that it was a combination of two extremist discourses in the Arabian Peninsula, tribal *asabiyah*, bond and religious zeal. Harold Dickson (1956), who closely observed the formation of the contemporary Saudi state as the British political agent in the Persian Gulf, argues that King Abdul Aziz's invention was to replace the tribal government system with "a modern form of government, with state council, various ministries, heads of departments ... after the fashion of more civilized countries" and to reduce the power of religious extremism and hold it in a proper check (p. 295). A cornerstone of King Abdul Aziz's modernization policy, however, was keeping the existing social structure intact. Tribal chiefs and religious scholars, for instance, preserve their traditional status as long as they abide by the rule of law. As a result, despite the fact that tribalism still exists in Saudi Arabia, there are no tribal gray regions or reservations that are out of the state's control.

The Saudi model of modernization was facilitated by two main factors: religion and oil. Religion in Saudi Arabia is the ultimate bond that holds the society together, provides it with a coherent sense of identity, and attaches it to Islam's holy land. The influx of oil revenues in the late 1940s has accelerated the pace of the modernization and development of the Kingdom and

its society. Together, these two factors have propelled Saudi Arabia into the international stage and have been driving the change inside the Kingdom.

While the Two Holy Mosques are year-around destinations for millions of Muslims, the influx of oil wealth has attracted workers and investors from all over the world. In contrast to the view that Saudi Arabia is a closed country, the Kingdom receives millions of people every year for its holy sites and booming economy. In 2007, for instance, 17,943,856 entered Saudi Arabia from 236 countries. 1,423,861 of them obtained residence permits to seek employment in the Kingdom (Annual Statistical Report of the Ministry of Interior, 2007).

Although outsourcing technical and labor jobs has impacted the Saudi culture and social structure, the most profound impact has been the outsourcing of the intellectual tasks. Due to the severe shortage of qualified teachers during the first three decades of the modernization plan, the Saudi educational institutions were staffed by teachers from different Arab countries. Although the ulama have monitored the transformation of the educational system from the traditional to the contemporary system as well as the curriculum content, foreign teachers have had a major impact on the younger generations. The negative impact, however, comes from the exposure to extremist political ideologies rather than educational ones. This exposure was a result of the influx of members of Islamic political parties who were persecuted in their countries and found refuge in the Kingdom (Lacroix, 2011). The role of the extremist political exiles in politicizing the religious discourse in their host countries cannot be overstated. This role will be discussed in the following chapters. Nevertheless, it is important to recall that the extremist political views of these political exiles were not a result of only religious extremism, but more importantly of specific political developments, some of which brought them into Saudi Arabia despite their disagreement with the Saudi political and religious discourse.

## **Regional and International Environment**

In the early stages of the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz laid a foundation on which to build a Muslim modern state. His challenge was not only how to unite fragmented towns and warring tribes, but also how to invent a model of a modern sovereign state during one of the most transitional stages in regional and international politics. During the First World War, the central part of the Arabia Peninsula was not an important theater of war; however, whatever happened in the Two Holy cities, Makkah and Medina, concerned the Ottoman Empire and millions of Muslims in the colonies of Western powers. Before the breakout of World War I, “the British were seeking to counter rising German influence in the eastern Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and Abdul Aziz was seeking to counter Ottoman support for the Al Rashid” (Long & Maisel, 2010, p. 35). After defeating his local rival Ibn Rashid, King Abdul Aziz annexed Makkah and Medina in the same year that the Islamic caliphate was abolished in Turkey in 1924. Despite his powerful position by that time, King Abdul Aziz dealt with this watershed development in a very pragmatic way. In contrast to a number of Muslim leaders, King Abdul Aziz did not claim the caliphate position. Instead, he declared:

I did not claim or seek the Islamic caliphate. The duty of an Islamic Caliph is applying the Islamic law on every Muslim everywhere, is there any man who can do this these days? It was possible during the era of the first four Righteous Caliphs when every individual Muslim was under their direct authority, but today it is not possible. However, I wish that Muslims would unite their stance ... make peace and stop harming each other (The Speech of His Majesty King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, 1933).

King Abdul Aziz laid down his vision of a Muslim modern state that applies the Islamic law and coexists with other nations. By building the new state on Islamic foundation and principles, King Abdul Aziz abolished the customary tribal law and banned the establishment of political organizations (including religious organizations) that may lead to disorder and sectarian division. When Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, approached him asking to open a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Kingdom, King Abdul Aziz unpleasantly replied: "What do you mean, a brotherhood of Muslims in this Kingdom of Muslims? We are all brothers in Islam. Why would we need a branch of the Islamic brotherhood?" (Frontline Interview with Prince Saud Al-Faisal, 2004).

At the regional and international levels, the Saudi foreign policy is activated through four main frameworks: Gulf, Arab, Islamic, and international (The Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2005). At the Arab and Islamic level, the Kingdom's solidarity with Arab and Islamic countries is driven by its Arabic identity and Islamic obligations. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and the cradle of the Arab race including the noblest Arab tribe, Quraish from which Prophet Mohammed arose.

It is not surprising that Arab and Islamic traditions influence the Saudi foreign policy given the fact that all Saudi citizens are Arab and Muslim (Long & Maisel, 2010). However, what is remarkable is the fast integration of the religious and traditionally conservative state into the modern international system. One can argue that the Saudi unitary political ideology facilitated its integration into the international system faster than other countries with several competing ideologies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the integration into the world system is guided and motivated by Islamic values. In the Saudi view, Islam is a universal system that "seeks to regulate the conduct of a Muslim state on the most just basis, not only with other



Muslim states but also with the rest of the world” (Madani, 1977, p. 8). Based on this principle, Saudi Arabia was a founding member of the United Nations, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Islamic World League. In fulfillment of the Islamic obligation of charity, Saudi Arabia works with Islamic and international organizations to provide economic aid and disaster relief to Muslims and non-Muslim alike. A recent study on the Saudi humanitarian aid states that:

Saudi Arabia has emerged as the world’s largest donor of humanitarian assistance outside the Western states ... Between 1975 and 2005, total Saudi aid to developing countries amounted to \$90 billion or 3.7% of its annual gross domestic product (GDP), far higher than the UN 0.7% of GDP target for development assistance and four times the average achieved by OECD-DAC countries (Al-Yahya & Fustier, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

At the international level, Saudi Arabia has maintained strong relations with major powers. These relations are based on not only economic interest, but also the status and strategic role of the Kingdom in the Arab and Islamic worlds (The Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2005). However, being closely involved in the Arab, Islamic, and International circles is not an easy undertaking. More than any other regions in the world, the Arab and Islamic worlds have witnessed not only a number of devastating wars, but also military occupations that defy a balanced political strategy. These conflicts have dramatically altered the security environment in the region and created grievances that give extremist non-state actors the chance to play an international role. The serious political impediments to crafting a grand

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<sup>4</sup> OECD-DAC stands for: Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee.

political strategy that can strike a balance among domestic, regional, and international levels are not exclusive to Saudi Arabia. However, it is more pronounced in Saudi Arabia given its close involvement in Arab, Islamic, and international circles.

## **Conclusion**

Given the stable environment in Saudi Arabia, why do some religious Saudis resort to violence? What explains the long period of stability before 1979? The religious explanation for contemporary violent episodes in reference to the eighteenth century Wahhabism is inadequate. In fact, there is a big gap between this approach to Wahhabism in the literature and the long-standing position of the Wahhabi traditional ulama regarding violence. The ulama's position against violence is clear and always supported by the main sources of the Islamic law, the holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet. According to The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), Saudi Arabia has witnessed far fewer terrorist incidents than Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, or the United States in the period from 1970 to 2001 (The Global Terrorism Database, 2008). Explaining the sudden surge of the number of Saudis joining international terrorist organizations in the recent years as a result of inherited extremist religiosity is not only simplistic, but also misleading.

This study argues that violence in Saudi Arabia, although exclusively religious, is motivated by extremist political ideology rather than religious extremism. The ultra-conservative Saudi religious community is not immune from extremism. However, if every Saudi extremist is violent, Saudi Arabia would not be the most stable country in the region. The timing of violent incidents in the Kingdom as well as the increasing number of Saudi militants abroad in recent years indicate a recent development in the Saudi society. This development is not a sudden surge in religiosity, but rather an evolution of a private political ideology.

Before the 1960s, the Saudi society was geographically and ideologically isolated from other political cultures. Despite the success of the Saudi modernization program which gradually transformed the traditional society to a modern one, it did not establish a clear political culture. This, in part, was due to the fact that there was no pressing need for ideological effort to frame an anti-colonialism struggle given the fact that Saudi Arabia has not been colonized like other countries in the region. The anti-colonialism ideology that enabled Islamic movements in other Islamic countries to organize and mobilize people did not exist in Saudi Arabia.

Due to the absence of a political culture within the Saudi society and the education system (traditional and contemporary), Saudi young generations have formed their private political ideology through momentous political events that shaped their perception of themselves as well as that of the world. A number of factors have facilitated the evolvement of a religious extremist worldview during these crises. First, most of the political events and conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s were either of a religious nature (the Iranian Revolution) or conflicts that were religioinized for political reasons (the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan). The second factor is the presence of political exiles who became political entrepreneurs under the banner of religion. Third, the revolution of information has played a major role in transnationalizing the extremist worldview. The following chapters will examine the impact of these events and the dynamics of mobilizing younger religious generations into violence.

## **Chapter 4 - The Political Religious Revolution in 1979**

What triggered violence in 1979 after five decades of peace and harmony in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? The timing and characteristics of the first wave of violence are inconsistent with the conventional explanations for terrorism, which focus only on political and economic deprivations or religious extremism. First, the structure of the Saudi government that had kept the balance between religion and politics for quite a long time had not experienced any major changes since the establishment of the Kingdom. Second, the Saudi economy had experienced unmatched growth in the 1970s offering unprecedented job opportunities for not only Saudis, but also millions of immigrant workers. Third, the transnational identity of the groups that committed violence in the Kingdom during this period indicates that this wave of violence is not exclusive to a specific religious doctrine.

This study argues that the first wave of violence that erupted in 1979 was instigated by a radical politico-religious ideology that developed among a small fraction of the younger generation in the aftermath of a paradigm shift in the regional political environment. Although this radical ideology had evolved since the 1960s, the Iranian revolution in 1979 created a crisis situation in which mobilization for violence was most possible. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the impact of the Iranian revolution on the mobilization for violence that followed. It examines violent episodes that took place in Saudi Arabia between 1979 and 1989 within their political, ideological, and social contexts.

This chapter first tests the study's core hypothesis, which holds that key regional political developments—in this case the Iranian revolution—have a major impact on the mobilization for violence. In addition, it evaluates the following relevant hypotheses presented in chapter 1:

**H2:** *The higher the level of the change in popular perception of insecurity, the more susceptible the public becomes to extremist mobilization.*

**H3:** *The more coherent the opposition's interpretation of the crisis, the more effective its mobilization efforts are.*

**H4:** *Effective state's counterterrorism terrorism efforts, rather than the course of the crisis, shorten the duration of terrorist campaigns.*

Before going into details about the violent groups and their ideologies that incited this wave of violence, it is important to introduce the wider political and ideological context in the Islamic world as well as the Saudi domestic environment.

### **Politico-religious Movement in the Islamic World**

In contrast to the religious reform movements in the eighteenth century, Islamic movements that emerged in the twentieth century were mostly political due to the political environments of their colonized countries. After World War I, Britain and France arbitrarily partitioned the Middle East into artificial states, some of which only recently became nations (Fromkin, 2001). David Fromkin (2001) argues that this partition ignored important historical, religious, and ethnic factors. He notes that:

The basis of political life in the Middle East – religion – was called into question by Russians, who proposed communism, and the British, who proposed nationalism or dynastic loyalty, in its place. Khomeini's Iran in the Shi'ite world and the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere in the Sunni world keep that issue alive. The French government, which in the Middle East *did* allow the religion to be the basis of politics – even of its own – championed one sect

against the others; and that, too, is an issue kept alive ... The Middle East had started along a road that was to lead to the endless wars ... and to the always-escalating acts of terrorism ... that have been a characteristic feature of international life in the 1970s and 1980s (pp. 17-18).

In this political context, religious and national movements emerged as anti-colonialism movements during the 1920s in colonized Islamic countries, attracting public support. The first Islamic world politico-religious organization, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was established in Egypt on March 22, 1928, by Hassan Al-Banna. According to its charter, the MB's objectives include "liberating every part of the Islamic world from non-Islamic authorities" and "the establishment of the Islamic state" (MB Charter, 1994). Although it has remained a mainstream movement, the MB has spawned a number of extremist offshoots such as Hizb Al-Tahrir Al-Islami (the Islamic Liberation Party), Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiah (the Islamic Group), Islamic Jihad, and Al-Takfeer Wal-Hijrah (Excommunication and Immigration) (Kepel, 2002; 2004). In British India on August 26, 1941, Syed Abul Ala Maududi established an Islamic political party, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP). In his inaugural address, Maududi declared that the party "needs man power to change the whole system of this world meaning thereby, to change morality, civilization, politics, culture, economics and society. So that God willed system prevails everywhere" (Maududi, 1941). Although religious, these organizations owe their success to the political context within which they emerged. Their political resistance ideologies were attractive during their countries' struggles for independence. It is important to note that the MB, the JIP, and other Islamic politico-religious movements in the twentieth century emerged as popular mainstream movements rather than militant groups. Although Islamic movements took on a

revolutionary mood throughout the 1950s and 1960s, only a small number of their offshoots resorted to violence against their new oppressive military regimes.

Ironically, due to the fact that new Arab military regimes sided with the Soviet Union, their Islamic oppositions fell under the Cold-War-framework's Western bloc. Islamic political activists operated within the overlap of the international Cold War and the regional cold war that began between the conservative and the revolutionary nationalist blocs in the Islamic world. While the conservative bloc included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, and Libya, the revolutionary nationalist bloc included Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen (Madani, 1977). Persecuted by their socialist-oriented governments, Islamic political activists found refuge in the Western and the conservative blocs. It was remarkable how revolutionary religious extremists found welcoming environments in their hosting countries despite their opposing political ideologies. Nevertheless, the ideological conflict between activists and their hosting countries would be stirred up during almost every key regional and international political development.

### **The Saudi Domestic Environment in the 1970s**

Although exiled religious activists had similar political agendas, their political activities were conditioned by the domestic political environment of their hosting countries. In contrast to Western countries, where religious activists were able to establish political organizations, Saudi Arabia bans political activities for religious exiles and Saudis alike. The Saudi law that bans the establishment of political organizations is not only a government mandate, but also a religious tradition. Saudi ulama regard politico-religious parties and political organizations as agents of dissension. It is important to note that Saudi-supported Islamic organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Conference (now known as the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation) are international organizations that admit only sovereign states. According to the charter of the

Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the member states determined to adhere “to the principles of the United Nations Charter, the present Charter and International Law; to preserve and promote the lofty Islamic values of peace, compassion, tolerance, equality, justice and human dignity” (OIC Charter, 2011). Therefore, political exiles and groups of dissidents cannot join such organizations.

As a result, Islamic political activists and migrant sheikhs, who took refuge in Saudi Arabia, took social and educational approaches rather than political ones. Therefore, they were able to continue Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiyah (the Islamic Awakening) that they started in their countries. The activities of migrant sheikhs in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s were facilitated by the fact that in Saudi Arabia religious activities in general are viewed by default as apolitical. As Stephane Lacroix (2011) explains, the notion of Sahwa “was not specifically Saudi but applied more generally to the widespread Islamic resurgence that had taken hold in the Muslim world since the 1960s. In the Arab world the phenomenon was closely linked to the rise of Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood” (pp. 51-52). Due to the incompatibility of their politico-religious traditions with that of the Saudi ulama, most of the migrant sheikhs operated outside of the Saudi official religious establishment. However, they dominated public and private education as well as the growing media apparatus. As Naser Al-Huzaimi, a Saudi theology student and a former member of the first militant group in the Kingdom, observed, the Kingdom suddenly became a center of official and unofficial religious education due to the presence of a large number of preachers who not only were Saudis, but also came from Egypt, Syria, Pakistan, and India (Al-Huzaimi, 2011).<sup>5</sup> Al-Huzaimi explains that during the 1970s,

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<sup>5</sup> Official education is the government-run public school system while the unofficial education is the religious classes held in mosques and after-school programs that did not have official curricula.



authorities viewed religious activists with less suspicion than socialists and nationalists.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the Saudi government closely monitored the migrant sheikhs' activities and extradited a number of politico-religious activists who tried to use religion for political gain. For instance, Mohammed Surur, an influential Syrian member of the MB, was asked to leave the Kingdom in 1973. He moved to Kuwait and then relocated to London (Kepel, 2004).

The influence and presence of the migrant sheikhs within the Saudi public arena was a result of not only their academic credentials and organizing skills, but also the conservative nature of the Saudi ulama. One important area in which the ultra conservatism of the Saudi ulama yielded to the dominant presence of the migrant sheikhs was the media. Although the media was run by the state by that time, Saudi conservative ulama tried to avoid it due to their prohibition of photography and imaging. Abdul Aziz Alkhedr, a Saudi analyst who had experience within the Sahwah community, criticizes the traditional way the ulama dealt with the changing environment around them. He notes that despite the rapid political, economic, and social developments that Saudi society was going through during the 1960s, the Saudi traditional conservative discourse remained unchanged and did not keep pace with the rapidly changing society (Alkhedr, 2010).

Beneath the surface of strict law, an ideological conflict between traditionalists and revolutionaries simmered. While the Saudi traditionalist ulama tried to maintain the status quo, migrant sheikhs hoped for a politico-religious revolution in the broader region, without which they could not return home. The dichotomy between the inward conservative approach of the Saudi ulama and the outward political activism of the migrant sheikhs created a divergence between the official religious message and what circulated in unofficial religious circles. As a

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<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Naser Al-Huzaimi, a former member of Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah.

result, the Saudi ulama confronted two different revolutionary currents that developed among the Saudi religious younger generation (Hegghammer & Lacroix, 2007). While both camps viewed the discourse of the Saudi traditional ulama as static in the midst of a revolutionary transformation, the first was more traditional than the Saudi traditional ulama. Its adherents believed that the Saudi ulama were not doing enough to preserve the Wahhabi tradition. This current was represented by a group of extremist students, Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah (JSM), which took over the Grand Mosque in Makkah in 1979.

The second consisted of the pupils of religious teachers promoting political ideologies (Al-Huzaimi, 2011). Although extremist traditionalism is not new to the region, politico-religious activism is a relatively modern concept. Gilles Kepel (2002), an expert on Islamic politics, argues that three figures contributed to the Islamic radical political ideology: Syyyid Qutb, the theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood, Abul Ala Maududi of Pakistan, and Rohollah Khomeini of Iran. He adds that:

All three men shared a vision of Islam as a political movement, and they all called for the establishment of an Islamic state. While opposing the secular nationalism that had dominated the 1960s, they also rejected the view within traditional Islam that relegated political combat to a secondary concern (p. 23).

Other experts argue that it was inevitable for these theories to reach Saudi Arabia as the religious and trade center of the Islamic world. James Buchan (1982) argues that “extreme ideas that had sprouted in the more fertile ground of Egypt, Sudan and the sub-continent had been wafted by the winds of trade, exile and pilgrimage to seed themselves in the Holy Land” (p. 515).

Young Saudi adherents to the political camp were fascinated not only by the new politico-religious theories, but also with the connection to the outside religious world through their foreign preachers and teachers. Al-Huzaimi explains that in Saudi Arabia during the 1970s a new trend emerged among some young students of reading books written by contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Qutb and Maududi instead of reading the traditional work of twelfth-century Islamic thinkers.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, adherents to the traditional camp dedicated their time to observing and preaching the Islamic traditional way of life that was, in their view, being lost with modernization. Although they emerged as peaceful volunteer-led groups, preaching groups from both camps, traditional and political, would eventually challenge the Saudi ulama's absolute traditional narrative authority. While political activists were under the radar of the Saudi government, traditionalists were first to rebel. In addition to their off-radar advantage, the traditionalists' rebellion was hastened, in part, by the increasing pace of modernization, which the political revolutionaries viewed as a vehicle for change and a bridge to a more sophisticated rebellion.

### **Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah (JSM)**

Organizing a *jamaah*, a group of volunteer preachers who travel to preach in different towns and remote villages, is an old tradition in the Islamic world. In conservative countries in particular, governments tolerate this tradition as long as it is apolitical. Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah (JSM) (the Salafi Group for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) was one of the first groups that emerged in modern Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> It was established

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<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with Naser Al-Huzaimi, a former member of Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the JSM was a group of volunteer preachers. It is different from the official government Committee of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (Mutaween).

in 1965 by four Saudis, a Yemeni, and an Egyptian. In the words of one of its members, all the founders of JSM—with the exception of the Egyptian who was a former member of the MB—came from Jamaat Altableegh, a well-known international proselytizing movement founded in India in 1926 (Al-Huzaimi, 2011).<sup>9</sup> Following the steps of Jamaat Altableegh, the JSM was a diversified loose-knit group with no central leadership. It was run by a council that consisted of seven members including the founders.

Blessed by the Saudi ulama, JSM started as a traditional apolitical law-abiding group of volunteers who dedicated their lives to preaching in mosques and public places. However, with the competition among religious groups increasing, JSM used its legal preaching to engage in more organized proselytizing activities. As a result, the groups attracted a large number of members, some of which were immigrant workers and international theology students. As Al-Huzaimi explains, the interaction among members from all over the world triggered heated debates about the future of the group and its position on all aspects of modern life.

The group was preoccupied with the notion of the end of the world, which in their view was being hastened by the new technological developments. As a result, some of the JSM's extremist members deserted their towns and lived in tents in the desert (Al-Huzaimi, 2011). Others started to question the religious knowledge of the Saudi traditional ulama who endorsed modern education system and technology. Consequently the students started to engage their sheikhs in controversial theology debates that were not always resolved. However, the JSM's point of departure from the traditional main stream was its peculiar position on the role of the state in Islamic community. JSM rejects the progressive role of the state and views it as an agent

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<sup>9</sup> Information about JSM throughout this study is based on the author's interview with Naser Al-Huzaimi, a former member of the JSM.

of deterioration for religious traditions. JSM's non-Saudi members destroyed their national identification documents and took refuge in the group's center houses in Makkah or Medina. Saudis who worked in the government, including public teachers, left their public jobs and established their own businesses. These unusual activities attracted the attention of the Saudi government, which arrested a number of JSM members in 1978. However, at that stage, the group had not been involved in illegal activities; therefore, the arrested individuals were released within a month.

However, the fact that the 1978 arrests were a first for religious activists in Saudi Arabia elevated the small group's status within the extremist community. Al-Huzaimi states that, suddenly after the government crackdown on the group, the marginalized group emerged as a well-known opposition. Excited agitators started drawing parallels between their group and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which also underwent a government crackdown. The celebrity-like status of the group attracted young students from both camps, traditional and political (Al-Huzaimi, 2011). Also, this status emboldened the group to intensify its rhetoric against the government. It called for its members as well as the public to abandon the public education system and go back to traditional religious education. Here, as Al-Huzaimi recalls, is where the group departed from Saudi traditionalism, which dictates obedience to the ruler as long as he applies the Islamic law. The extremist view of the group's ideologues led to a division among its members regarding public education and governmental jobs. As a result, a large number of university students and public employees left the group. The most ardent within the group went underground to avoid government crackdown.

After this division, Juhayman Alutaibi, a hardliner tribesman and one of the founders of the group, led the remaining members onto a more extremist path. He ordered his followers to

refrain from theology classes taught by Saudi ulama. Instead, he issued theological pamphlets that detailed—in his view—where the ulama strayed from the traditional path. The pamphlets were presumably written by Juhayman and published by a socialist publishing house in Kuwait. Al-Huzaimi states that the socialist publisher agreed to publish the material only when they learned that it was written by a leader of a Saudi religious opposition.<sup>10</sup> Although the pamphlets discuss different theological issues, they center around four main points: state legitimacy, purifying Islam, the return of the guided one (the Mahdi), and the belief in dreams as harbingers of the future. In JSM ideology, these ideas are intertwined in one apocalyptic scenario: when the government strays from the traditional religious way, corruption proliferates, which will hasten the appearance of the guided one. Dreams will guide the pious worshipers to foresee what is to come. This peculiar ideology is a mixture of both traditional and revolutionary schools of thought. It combines the traditional notions of the Mahdi and the power of dreams with the anti-state revolutionary doctrine. Some analysts argue that JSM's ideology was a modified version of different extremist ideologies. James Buchan (1982) explains that:

Juhaiman mentions the Muslim Brotherhood, found in Egypt, the Jamiat al Tabligh, an anti-imperial movement from India, the Ansar al Sunna of Sudan, and the Jamiat al Islah of Kuwait. He remarks that he corrected their errors and recruited their adherent—almost all of them non-Saudi—to swell his band (p. 516).

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<sup>10</sup> Al-Huzaimi explained to the author that due to his weak academic background, Juhayman did not write the whole series of pamphlets, but it was a product of teamwork.

However, in contrast to traditional and revolutionary ideologies, the JSM's ideology did not have a plan for an Islamic government. Rather, its plan was a messianic scenario for the end of the world.

From their hide-outs, the inner circle of the JSM continued preaching their ideology through pamphlets and recorded cassette tapes. Due to the lack of modern communications and satellite news channels, the JSM was isolated from not only the outside world, but also the Saudi public. Its interaction with the government was known only within religious tight-knit circles. However, in another part of the Islamic world, the whole region was about to witness a sweeping religious revolution that would shift revolutionary ideology from the group level to the societal and state levels.

### **The Religious Iranian Revolution in 1979**

In the Shiite part of the Islamic world, a different revolutionary view of the role of government in the Islamic community was articulated by Ruhollah Khomeini, an exiled Iranian cleric. Khomeini's journey as an exiled preacher resembles that of the migrant sheikhs who found refuge in the West and some Islamic states. First, as a result of his revolutionary preaching, he was forced into exile to Turkey, Iraq, and then to France. His only way back home was through religious revolution. Like other Sunni revolutionaries, his aim was not improving the existing governance system in the Islamic world, but rather changing it altogether. From his exile in Neauphle-le-Château on the outskirts of Paris, Khomeini modified the Shiite theory of *vilayat-i faqih*, the guardianship of the jurist, to grant the clerics the absolute right to not only rule the state, but also to expand their rule beyond the borders of the nation-states to the broader Islamic nation (Louer, 2008, p. 5). Khomeini's ideology resembles the ideology of the JSM in content, but differs from it in purpose. He based his political theory on the traditional prophecy

of the Mahdi, which holds that the guided one will appear to lead the true believers in victory over the unbelievers. Khomeini, as Ajami (1999) puts it, “stepped into the role of savior, merged with it, a natural fulfillment of the messianic Shiite Imam who appears at the ‘end of time’ to humble the wicked and raise the lowly.” However, Khomeini’s purpose was not only salvation from a corrupt world, but also to build a religious state and export his revolution to put the Islamic world under his guardianship. As one scholar puts it, Khomeini’s political theory “represents a revolution in Islam rather than an ‘Islamic revolution’” (Menashri, 1990, p. 44).

Like their Sunni counterparts, Shiites have their traditional religious scholars who give religion precedence over politics. Although they believe in the Mahdi prophecy, they do not endorse Khomeini’s political theory. For instance, Abu Al-Qassim Al-Khoi, a prominent Grand Ayatollah who was born in Iran and lived in Iraq until his death in 1992, opposed the revolutionary doctrine of Khomeini. Vali Nasr (2006), an expert on Shiite politics, noted that:

Khoi was religiously conservative, and to him a key part of that principled conservatism was loyalty to the traditional quietist position that Shia ulama had embraced since the Savadi period. Khoi’s importance in placing limits on the reach of Khomeini’s ideas and prestige is often underrated and underrecognized. He kept alive a tradition of Shia thought that accords more leeway to the idea of distinguishing between religious and political authority (p.145).

Despite the fact that most of the prominent traditional Shiite scholars opposed it, Khomeini’s theory struck a chord with young people and more importantly with political activists. Iranian liberals and intellectuals who opposed the Shah’s regime such as Mehdi Bazargan (the first Iranian prime minister), Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani (a pro-democracy theologian), and Ali Shariati (Sorbonne graduate) supported the Khomeini’s call for change



(Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). As influential educators, they had a major role in influencing the people's perception toward not only the need for change, but also the key role of Khomeini in their religion revival. Some analysts argue that Ali Shariati, in particular, had influenced Khomeini as much as his followers (Kohn & McBride, 2011). In one of his lectures at the Technical University of Tehran, Ali Shariati (1971) states that:

To emancipate and guide the people, to give birth to a new love, faith, and dynamism, and to shed light on people's hearts and minds and make them aware of various elements of ignorance, superstition, cruelty and degeneration in contemporary Islamic societies, an enlightened person should start with "religion" ... He should begin by an Islamic Protestantism similar to that of Christianity in the Middle Ages, destroying all the degenerating factors which, in the name of Islam, have stymied and stupefied the process of thinking and the fate of the society, and giving birth to new thoughts and new movements.

Iranian secular intellectuals might not have believed in Khomeini's ideology, but they "believed that, in the aftermath, they could easily outflank this charismatic but impotent old man—or so they thought" (Kepel, 2002, p. 7).

At the societal level, Khomeini's die-hard followers bestowed upon him supernatural power and considered him the *Mahdi* who would protect them and revive their religion. Thrilled by the tense spiritual environment, some Iranians claimed that they "had seen the Khomeini's face on the moon" as a sign of his imminent return (Ajami, 1999). Ironically, after the revolution, Khomeini came into conflict with not only Iranian intellectuals, but neighboring Islamic countries, the West, the East, and anybody who did not believe in his guardianship. Based on his self-claimed guardianship of the Islamic nation, he urged the Muslim masses to emulate the

Iranian revolution in their countries. With his propaganda, Khomeini targeted Saudi Arabia in particular because in his so-called Islamic guardianship theory, Makkah and Medina should be under his authority. Furthermore, the Islamic leading role that Saudi Arabia has taken, including the organization of the Hajj, the annual largest Muslim gathering, runs contrary to the narrative of Khomeini's guardianship theory.

On September 25, 1979, Khomeini wrote his first message after the revolution to the pilgrims in Makkah. In this message he declared that Islam "is a religion where worship is joined to politics and political activity is a form of worship" (Message to the Pilgrims). Two weeks later, a group of Iranian militants took over the US embassy in Tehran. In the midst of the turmoil, the JSM seized the Grand Mosque of Makkah, and this was followed by a Shiite riot and a series of Iranian-supported violent acts in Saudi Arabia throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

### **The Takeover of the Grand Mosque in Makkah**

Isolated from the world in the mountains West of Saudi Arabia, the JSM developed its messianic ideology to a point of no return. Members of JSM were occupied by the notion of the end of the world and the return of the Mahdi to the extent that they started experiencing – or as they thought – a collective dreaming. In their dreams, they saw the awaited Mahdi in the Grand Mosque in Makkah where the worshippers pay him allegiance.<sup>11</sup> The notion of the Mahdi, however, is not exclusive to the JSM. The return of the rightly guided one is rooted in many cultures and religions. In the Islamic Sunni traditional narrative, when the world is filled with injustice, a man bearing the name of the Prophet (Mohammed Ibn Abdullah) will rise to bring peace and justice to the world. He will appear by the beginning of a century, according to the Islamic calendar, in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque in Makkah where the believers pay him

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<sup>11</sup> Author's interview with Nasser Al-Huzaimi.

allegiance. Based on this general narrative, different Islamic groups interpret the return of the Mahdi differently according to their own worldview. Despite the parallels between the JSM and the Iranian revolution, they did not influence each other. In fact, due to their opposing ideologies, each one considered the other as a threat to Islam.<sup>12</sup>

In the view of JSM, the evolution of modern technologies coupled with the turmoil in the region is an indication of the imminent appearance of the Mahdi. Six months before they seized the Grand mosque, a number of the JSM's members claimed that they simultaneously experienced dreams that one of their companions, Mohammed Ibn Abdullah Al-Qahtani, was the awaited Mahdi. Juhayman trusted Al-Qahtani (his brother-in-law) and embraced this scenario, and he tried to convince Al-Qahtani and the rest of the group to follow it. Al-Qahtani did not believe that he was the awaited Mahdi at first, but under the group's pressure, he agreed to assume the Mahdi's role.<sup>13</sup> Dealing with a sacred tradition in this simplistic way, however, led to another division in the group and created a sense of betrayal. While the members who opposed Juhayman's scenario and left as a result felt that the group betrayed the conservative tradition, which opposes bestowing holiness on individuals, the remaining zealots felt that the defected members betrayed their brethren.

The diversity of JSM members who believed in the prophetic scenario is astonishing. They came from all walks of life and academic backgrounds from Saudi Arabia and other countries. However, some analysts argue that although most of the JSM's members believed in the "end of the world" theory, they did not necessarily believe in Juhayman's scenario. James

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<sup>12</sup> Author's interview with Nasser Al-Huzaimi.

<sup>13</sup> This is not surprising given the fact that a number of religious activists claimed to be the Mahdi in similar circumstances and achieved some of their goals. Among these activists was Mohammed Ahmed Ibn Abdullah of Sudan who defeated the Anglo-Egyptian forces in Sudan in 1885 and Merza Ahmed, founder of the Ahmediyah movement in Kashmir in 1889.

Buchan (1982) argues that “among Juhaiman’s band, with its assortment of Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, Pakistanis, and Americans, there must have been men to whom this bizarre world of ancient (and partly spurious) prophecy meant little” (p. 520). However, the notion of the Mahdi’s return was very powerful during that time. Al-Huzaimi recalls that people from different parts of the Islamic world came to Makkah on the first day of the Islamic century to witness the possible Mahdi’s appearance. In the view of the JSM members, the event meant protection and salvation rather than destruction. Therefore, some of them brought their families and children along. The leadership of the JSM exploited the broad tradition to impose a narrow radical worldview. With much emphasis on the end-of-the-world notion the JSM succeeded in causing the traditionalists to abandon their conservatism and follow their prophetic dreams.

In another deviation from the Islamic traditions that prohibit fighting in mosques, particularly the Grand Mosque of Makkah, Juhayman was able to convince his inner circle that it was necessary for them to take up arms in the Grand Mosque. He assured them that the weapons would be used only to protect the Mahdi from “the enemies of Islam.” Fearing that more followers would back down, Juhayman did not inform everybody in his group of the whole plan. The only thing every member knew was to attend the *fajr* (dawn) prayer at the Grand Mosque on a particular day; he planned to reveal the full plan later.

Based on the Mahdi prophecy, which holds that the Mahdi will appear at the beginning of a century, Juhayman selected the first day of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Islamic calendar (1/1/1400), the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 1979. Several days prior to that day, a number of his trusted adherents managed to smuggle small arms, ammunition, and some food using coffins and maintenance cars. Other members drove their own cars to Makkah just like any other commuter that morning. More than 200 JSM members managed to enter the mosque as planned. The facts that the Grand

Mosque was open around the clock and security forces were forbidden from intervening with the worshipers facilitated the intrusion. They were able to take their positions without any notice.

As soon as the worshipers faced the *Kaabah* (the center of the Grand Mosque) and started their prayer during which Muslims humble themselves before God and refrain from looking around, JSM members quickly and quietly chained all the Mosque's entrances. When the imam concluded the prayer, he was pushed aside by the JSM's spokesman, Khaled Al-Yami, who seized the microphone to announce the return of the Mahdi. Using the mosque's public-address system, they relayed their message to the worshippers who were locked behind the chained gates. The JSM's spokesman assured the worshippers that the group came to protect them and convey the good news of the awaited Mahdi. Then, he recited some Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet that mentioned the return of the Mahdi and interpreted them to match the JSM's scenario. Al-Huzaimi recalls that the armed Noor Addin Al-Rashidi, the son of a Pakistani theology teacher in Makkah, read an Urdu version of the speech to a group of Pakistani pilgrims who started cheering.<sup>14</sup> Then, the supposed Mahdi walked to the center of the mosque to receive the worshipers' allegiance. After paying allegiance to the Mahdi, the militants ordered the worshippers to do the same. In an attempt to spread the word, the militants allowed a small group of worshipers to leave the mosque and then they warned through the mosque's public-address system that they would shoot anybody trying to enter or exit the mosque.

The fact that the JSM was not known outside Saudi Arabia led to a number of speculations around the world. With the U.S. embassy in Tehran already seized by Iranian revolutionaries two weeks before the incident in Makkah, the U.S. and Iran, in particular, mutually exchanged accusations over responsibility for the incident. In one of his early

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<sup>14</sup> Author's interview with Al-Huzaimi.

telegrams sent to the State Department, Ambassador John West, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, wrote: “We have received reports indicating occupiers could be Iranian or Yemini” (State, 1979). Iran, on the other hand, saw in the crisis an opportunity to export its revolution. Khomeini declared from his headquarters in Qum that his war against the U.S. amounted to war between Islam and America. He accused the U.S. and Israel of launching an attack on the Holy Mosque as reaction to the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Khomeini declared that “we hope that all Islamic nations join us in the fight, which is a fight between Islam and blasphemy, between ourselves and America” (Mortimer, 1979). Before Khomeini concluded his televised speech, a violent riot started in front of the U.S. embassy in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. The rioters stormed and burned the U.S. embassy, killing a Marine guard and trapping 100 U.S. diplomats in a vault for five hours (Hovey, 1979).

The Iranian propaganda, coupled with the Saudi blackout on information about the incident, increased the anti-American sentiment throughout the Islamic world. U.S. embassies and consuls in Turkey, Bangladesh, and Kuwait were targets of violent demonstrations (Mortimer, 1979). Although the major Saudi cities remained remarkably calm, the Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, issued a statement declaring that the U.S. had nothing to do with the incident. He clarified that “the Mecca incident was the work of Muslim fundamentalists and that no Westerners were involved” (Brogan, 1979).

The JSM’s activities were known to the Saudi government; however, the takeover of the Grand Mosque took the government by surprise. In addition to the turmoil in the region, the Saudi authorities were busy organizing the arrival and departure of thousands of pilgrims through the Kingdom’s airports, seaports, and borders with eight neighbors. In the wake of the Mosque takeover, which came at the end of the Hajj season, the Saudi government assembled a

task force that consisted of police, Army, and National Guard forces to deal with the rampage. Although the Saudi military overpowered the militants, the Saudi government faced a political and religious dilemma. First, fighting in the Holy Mosque is strongly prohibited; it was difficult to attack Islam's holiest site without religious support. Second, the Saudi government was obligated to protect the lives and safety of the 50,000 multinational worshippers in the mosque.

Saudi ulama who had been a primary target of the JSM propaganda were particularly outraged by the aggression on the sacred Mosque. They condemned the act as an attack not only on the sacred Mosque, but also on Islam. They issued a fatwa that called for the militants to surrender or face the consequences. The fatwa stressed using the minimum force possible to rescue the worshippers and protect the Mosque (The Fatwa of the Saudi Ulama, 1979).

When the Saudi force started its operation, the supposed Mahdi was among the first to fall. The death of the supposed Mahdi—who according to the prophecy is not supposed to die—was the living evidence of the zealots' delusionary scenario. While a number of them surrendered to the Saudi forces, others denied the death of their Mahdi and kept fighting. It took the Saudi forces two weeks, 127 fatalities, and 451 wounded soldiers to clear the mosque of the militants. According to the Saudi Interior Ministry (1980), 117 militants were killed and 105 (including 23 women and children) were captured. The Saudi authorities released women and children and brought the rest of the militants to justice. Sixty-three militants were executed in eight Saudi cities and nineteen others were sentenced to prison. Among the executed militants were forty-two Saudis, nine Egyptians, seven Yemenis, three Kuwaitis, an Iraqi, and a Sudanese (Saudi Interior Ministry Statement, 1980). The militants were sentenced to death and prison by Shariah law, the very same law whose leniency they opposed.

## **Shiite Riot**

While the Saudi troops were battling the militants in the Holy Mosque in the Western Province, a riot erupted in the oil-rich Eastern Province of the country. Influenced by the Iranian propaganda, some extremist Shiites sent threatening letters to American and Saudi employees at Saudi oil installations. In a telegram to the State department, the American Consul in the Eastern Province wrote: "For the first time in many years a significant degree of anti-Americanism appears to be emerging in Eastern Province, mainly among Saudi Shiites but perhaps among some foreign Muslim workers as well" (Dahran, 1979). On November 30<sup>th</sup>, zealot rioters started burning cars and looting shops and banks. Although the Saudi security forces stepped in and stabilized the unrest in a relatively short time, this tragic event, coupled with the Makkah incident, left a tear in the fabric of the Saudi society. "For the Saudi leaders," as Gilles Kepel (2002) points out, "the balance they had so carefully constructed over the last decade was under serious threat" (p. 119).

## **Iranian-Supported Violence**

The impact of the Iranian revolution did not stop at the ideological influence but extended to the direct involvement in violent acts. Although Saudi Arabia was one of the first countries that recognized the revolutionary government in Tehran in 1979, Khomeini had targeted Saudi Arabia with his propaganda since he came to power. His calls for emulating the Iranian revolution in Saudi Arabia in particular accelerated to a direct support for violence. This section will examine the violent episodes in Saudi Arabia, which were supported directly by Iran during the 1980s.

As mentioned above, Khomeini viewed the annual pilgrimage to Makkah, which brings together more than two million Muslims and attracts international publicity, as a political



platform. While Khomeini views Hajj as an opportunity for Muslims to declare *baraa'*, disavowal of disbelievers, namely the U.S., Israel, and the Soviet Union, Saudi authorities refuse to politicize the sacred ritual. As Kepel (2002) notes, the Saudi policy and care taken to “prevent any kind of trouble was in direct contrast to the revolutionary spirit with which the Iranian leadership viewed the event” (p. 134). Khomeini had consistently tried to exploit the Hajj season for both exporting his revolutionary ideology and discrediting the Saudi legitimacy and capacity to organize the symbolic Muslim gathering. The Saudi policy of maintaining a tranquil Hajj is not only a matter of national security, but also a religious obligation. In Hajj, Muslims are supposed to dedicate their six-day ritual to worship and supplication. As mentioned in the Quran: “there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage” (Quran 2:197).

### ***The Explosives Plot***

Despite the religious prohibition and governmental regulations against politicizing the Hajj, Iranians had tried to turn the Hajj into a political jamboree since 1980. In order to stabilize the Hajj and deny the Iranians the publicity they seek, Saudi security forces usually contain Iranian demonstrations and try to disperse them without incidents. However, the Iranians kept escalating their provocative activities. At 6:50 AM on August 8, 1986, Iranian Airlines flight 3169 carrying five hundred pilgrims landed in King Abdul Aziz Airport in Jeddah. During normal inspection, the airport authorities discovered a large amount of explosives in a suitcase. When they thoroughly inspected the other suitcases, the authorities found highly explosive material (C4) hidden in ninety-five suitcases (Disavowal and Explosives, 1987). The explosives, which amounted to fifty-one kilograms, indicate that the Iranian plot would have gone beyond the Grand Mosque in Makkah had the Iranians succeeded in smuggling the explosives.

Saudi authorities detained the leader of the detachment, Mohammed Ali Dahnawi, and his brother, who admitted that they were ordered by the Iranian revolutionary guard to smuggle the explosives. In their confession, which was aired on Saudi television, the Dahnawis confessed that they delivered the explosives to fulfill a national duty. However, they stated that they did not know how and where the explosives would be used (Disavowal and Explosives, 1987). The rest of the Iranian pilgrimages, who were mostly elder men and women, stated that they did not know anything about the explosives. They explained that Dahnawi asked them to check in their suitcases fifteen days prior to their departure from Esfahan. With their organizers detained, the Iranian pilgrims continued their ritual journey and went back home after Hajj. The leaders of the plot, the Dahnawi brothers, were sent to Iran after the investigations, in what the Saudi Interior Minister described as “a good-faith gesture” (Statement from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1987). The Saudi authorities did not publicize the 1986 plot in an attempt to stabilize the Hajj and end the Iranian confrontation. However, in the next year the Iranians came determined to provoke an excessive Saudi reaction.

### ***The Iranian Violent Riot in Makkah***

In 1987, in his daily radio address to the pilgrims, Khomeini called for revolutionary demonstrations. In one broadcast, he declared: “The disavowal of the pagans should be carried out with as much ceremony as possible during the hajj period, in the form of demonstrations and marches” (McFadden, 1987). At 2:30 PM on July 31, 1987, a group of head-banded Iranian revolutionary guard organized a gathering of seventy thousand Iranian pilgrims near the Grand Mosque in Makkah. The gathering soon transformed into an organized riot blocking the movements of other pilgrims, who according to the Hajj rituals need to attend to certain places at certain times. Carrying large banners that portray Khomeini’s and different political slogans, the

Iranian rioters marched toward the Grand Mosque chanting: “Death to America! Death to the Soviet Union! Death to Israel!” (Kifner, 1987).

Despite the fact that the Iranian rioters attacked businesses and set police vehicles on fire, Saudi security forces tried to contain the riot and called the rioters to disperse. However, the marching rioters pushed the pilgrims into a narrow ally leading to the Grand Mosque in an attempt to enter the mosque. According to the Hajj rituals, blocking the pilgrims from entering and leaving the mosque, on that day in particular, is enough to spoil the whole Hajj season. Fearing another takeover, a Saudi anti-riot unit blocked the riot from entering the mosque. Then, a hand-to-hand battle erupted between the anti-riot unit and the Iranian rioters who were armed with knives and iron bars. Due to the surge and retreat of the crowd, hundreds were trampled and suffocated to death. By 7:30 PM, the riot dispersed leaving 402 dead and 649 injured. Among the dead were 85 Saudis, 42 pilgrims of different nationalities, and 275 Iranians (Statement from the Saudi Ministry of Interior, 1989).

In the aftermath of the violent riot, Saudi Arabia received visits and messages of support from heads of Muslim countries as well as religious scholars condemning the Iranian behavior (Um Al-Qura, 1987; Kifner, 1987). When George P. Shultz, the U.S. Secretary of State, praised the Saudi conduct “in the face of what he called Iran outrage in Mecca,” the Iranians, once again, used their enmity toward the U.S. to justify their violence (Gillette, 1987). Iranian President Ali Khamenaei declared that the “plot is a US-deigned conspiracy.” His Prime Minister, Mir Hossein Mousavi, went further to warn that “Iran would mobilize its resources to avenge what he called the massacre of the pilgrims” (Kifner, 1987).

On the next day, August 1, 1987, an Iranian mob attacked the Saudi and Kuwaiti embassies in Tehran. The mob set the embassies on fire and kidnapped four Saudi diplomats.

One of the Saudi diplomats died due to severe injuries (Statement from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1987; Kifner, 1987). As a result of the repeated Iranian violations, Saudi Arabia took the initiative and broke diplomatic ties with Iran in 1988 (Um Al-Qura, 1988; Sciolino, 1988). However, the Saudi authorities did not deny the Iranian people their right to perform the Hajj. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Saudi Interior Minister, stated that all Muslims had the right to perform their pilgrimage in Makkah “regardless of nationality and even regardless of their political views.” He added: “We welcome [the Iranians] as Moslems, but they will not be allowed to demonstrate...We must explain to Iranians that they will carry the consequences of any actions they provoke...We would like the whole Islamic world to know that this is our position” (Ibrahim, 1988).

In a political protest, the Iranian government prevented the Iranian people from going to Makkah and boycotted the Hajj for three years starting in 1988. However, extremists within the Iranian government did not refrain from their extremist acts. They recruited other nationalities to carry on their spoiling strategy during Hajj.

### ***Explosions in Makkah***

On July 10 during Hajj in 1989 while the Grand Mosque in Makkah was crowded with pilgrims, two bombs simultaneously exploded near the mosque. According to a statement from the Saudi Interior Ministry (1989), a Pakistani pilgrim was killed and sixteen pilgrims of other nationalities were injured. Among the sea of pilgrims the Saudi authorities were able to capture the culprits and bring them to justice. Twenty Kuwaiti Shiite men, fourteen of whom were of Iranian origin, were tried and convicted based on their confessions. According to their confessions, which were broadcasted on Saudi television, the twenty-man cell was a part of the Kuwaiti Hezbollah organization. The group’s leader, Mansour Hasan Almhmeed, a thirty-two-

year-old elementary teacher, confessed that “the members of his terrorist cell were trained by Iranian diplomats based in Kuwait” (Ibrahim, 1989). Sixteen of the convicted terrorists were executed and four were sentenced to prison.

The Iranian supported violence in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s was driven by an extremist political ideology. It was an attempt to undermine the Saudi government’s position within the Islamic world and discredit its legitimacy to organize the Hajj. Moreover, the Iranians tried to intimidate the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia in particular, into refraining from supporting Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war. Although the Iranians’ motivation was political, they exploited the Shiite religious fervor to mobilize religious zealots in ways that served the political interest. Within this context, while the Iranians failed in exporting their revolution, it was remarkable how they succeeded in using the dynamics created by the crisis situation to mobilize not only Saudi extremists for violence, but also other extremists from friendly neighboring countries such as Kuwait and Bahrain.

### **The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Violent Extremism**

The impact of the Iranian revolution on the regional politics is substantial. Within the scope of this study, the impact of the Iranian revolution can be categorized according to three main levels: state, organizational, and societal. This section will discuss the impact of the Iranian revolution on state and organizational levels. Its impact on the societal level will be discussed in the next section. At the state level, the Iranian revolution followed by Khomeini’s attempt to export the revolution to other Islamic countries created a new crisis in the region. Within the regional cold war between conservative and nationalist revolutionary states, Khomeini opened a new religious revolutionary front. While his propaganda and violent plots targeted the conservative bloc, particularly Saudi Arabia, Khomeini with his rise to power demonstrated to

the Arab republics the real threat of their religious oppositions. This in turn led to more conservatism in the conservative bloc and more oppression (or appeasement in the case of Al-Sadat's government in Egypt) for Islamic political activities in the Arab nationalist bloc. More importantly, the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iraq-Iran war shifted the strategic paradigm for regional and global superpowers. For the first time, the Iraq-Iran war aligned the Islamic conservative states with their Arab rival revolutionary republics behind Iraq. The Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates) established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981. The war also, ironically, placed the United States and the Soviet Union on the same side (Iraq) for the first time during the cold war period (Long, 1990).

At the organizational level, due to the Sunni-Shiite ideological division, the Iranian revolution had more significant impact on Shiite than Sunni politico-religious organizations. Khomeini's theory, *vilayat-i faqih*, is about organizing and linking Shiite minorities to an Iranian-educated cleric. Those clerics would be, in turn, linked to the central leadership in Tehran (Kostiner, 1987). The Khomeini guardianship would provide the necessary means and support for those who believe in its doctrine. Although not all Shiites believe in Khomeini's theory, a number of Shiite organizations emerged in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. In Saudi Arabia in particular, the first Saudi underground Shiite organization, the Organization of the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (OIRAP) emerged under the leadership of Saudi Shiite scholar Hasan Alsaffar in 1979. The fact that Alsaffar did not believe in the *vilayat-i faqih* theory, which requires blind obedience to Tehran, made extremist elements in the Iranian government look for more extremist Shiites in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, like other Islamic countries, Iranians established militant cells called Hezbollah parties. The Saudi Hezbollah

group, which was established in the early 1980s, is an underground militant group with ideological and logistical ties with the Lebanese Hezbollah (Alhatlani, 2009). Although the Saudi Hezbollah perpetrated one of the most devastating terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia in 1996, it represents a small fraction of the Saudi Shiites. Other Gulf States, particularly Bahrain and Kuwait, which have a larger percentage of Shiite citizens, witnessed a more severe wave of violence throughout the 1980s (Kostiner, 1987). It is hard to assess the Iranian direct involvement in the wave of violence that swept the Gulf region after the revolution. However, the sudden eruption of violence committed by long-time peaceful Shiites in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution is an indication of the negative influence of the revolution on Shiites in the Gulf. Despite the rise of Shiite fervor in the aftermath of the revolution and the Iranian attempt to export the revolution, Iran failed in mobilizing this fervor into an Iranian-like revolution elsewhere in the Islamic world (Esposito, 1990; Long, 1990). The Iranian influence did not go beyond these close-knit militant circles.

For Sunni politico-religious activists, a cleric coming to power using religion was a fulfilled prophecy. Although they did not believe in his ideology, the success of Khomeini's passage proved their doctrine right and gave them hope for putting this doctrine into practice. Shahrough Akhavi, who studies the impact of the Iranian revolution on Egyptian groups, some of which were active in Saudi Arabia in 1979, found that the Iranian influence on Sunni militant groups "appears to be based on a need to replicate the *spirit* of the Shii revolutionaries, not any particularly Shii organizational forms, doctrinal principles, or eschatological ends" (Akhavi, 1990, p. 142).

In Saudi Arabia, some experts argue that the Iranian revolution psychologically impacted the JSM and inspired it to take over the Grand Mosque in Makkah (Long, 1990). As expressed in

an interview with the author, Naser Al-Huzaimi, a former member of the JSM, supports this view. He states that the Iranian revolution was consistent with the JSM's ideology, which centered on the imminent end of the corrupt world. In the JSM's view, Khomeini is a heretic and the Iranian revolution was a downturn in the Islamic history. This, in turn, emboldened their efforts to purify Islam by launching their apocalyptic rebel. However, Al-Huzaimi stresses that there was no ideological impact of the Iranian revolution on the JSM.

Within the wider Islamic movement, a review of 1980s Islamic mainstream as well as militant organizations' publications such as the journal of the Muslim World League, the journal of Al-Azhar, Al-Dawah of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Mujtama, and Al-Mukhtar Al-Islami reveals little ideological impact of the Iranian revolution on the writings of Arab Sunni thinkers. In addition to the Sunni-Shiite ideological division, this was a result of the Iraq-Iranian war, which was perceived as an Arab-Persia war. The war had a negative impact on Iranian efforts to mobilize Sunni militants against their governments.

In sum, the Iranian revolution had a direct impact on the Shiite militant organizations and indirect impact on Sunnis. Thus, the core hypothesis (H1), which holds that *the Iranian revolution had a major impact on the overall militant mobilization in the 1980s*, is partially supported. Although the Iranians failed to generate a popular mobilization, they have maintained strong ties with small minorities among Shiite communities all over the Islamic world. This radical minority believes in following the footsteps of Khomeini to establish an Islamic Shiite empire. Ironically, their extremist Sunni counterparts believe in violent means to achieve their Islamic Sunni caliphate. Both extremist currents would be responsible for most terrorist acts in the region and in Saudi Arabia in particular. The ideological impact of the Iranian revolution on Sunni militants was limited; however, the revolution created a crisis situation, in which a number



of dynamics came into play as driving forces for transnational mobilization. One of the most effective dynamics is the change in public perception of insecurity, collective action, and the role of religion in politics. As shown in the next section, the effectiveness of the change in public perception during a crisis situation is conditioned by other factors such as the role of political entrepreneurs and the way the crisis is interpreted.

### ***Change in Public Perception***

In 1979, the Iranian revolution came after three decades of politico-religious activism, during which Islamic politico-religious organizations had failed to mobilize the masses for collective action. Despite the Sunni-Shiite ideological division, a religious revolution that topples a strong government such that of the Shah of Iran represents a paradigm shift not only in the religious-secular struggle, but also in the psyche of the Muslim masses. The Iranian revolution changed both the popular and governmental perceptions toward the feasibility and the threat of the politico-religious activities. It put into practice the political-religious message that had been considered an alien concept within traditional societies. More importantly, the Iranian revolution and the violent events that followed shaped the political ideology of the Islamic youth, particularly those who had not been exposed to political change.

In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, sudden religious revival fervor swept Shiite societies all over the Islamic world. In the words of Hasan Alsaffar, the founder of the first Shiite opposition organization in Saudi Arabia, the political situation within the Shiite minority suddenly became volatile. Alsaffar recalls that in the wake of the Iranian revolution, immature Shiite groups adopted sharp slogans and titles, some of which were not endorsed by the Iranian revolutionaries themselves (Interview with Sheikh Hasan Alsaffar, 2008). The violent riots that broke out in Shiite populated regions in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution—even before any

organized Iranian support—demonstrate the impact of the change in public perception on the mobilization for violence.

The shift in public perception caused by the Iranian revolution was not, however, exclusive to Shiites. Although there was no ideological connection between the Iranian religious movement and the JSM, the Sunni militant group that took over the Grand Mosque in Makkah, the psychological impact was evident. The abrupt collapse of the formidable government in Iran before a religious movement, indeed, inspired the JSM to go from an underground proselytizing group to an armed rebellion. The idea to take up arms, as Al-Huzaimi explains, came at a later phase of the JSM's strategy.

The fact that the Shiite riot in the Saudi Eastern province coincided with the Sunni rampage in Makkah is an indicator of the psychological impact of the Iranian revolution on Shiites and Sunnis alike. This sudden wave of violence instigated by ideologically different groups supports the public perception hypothesis (**H3**) that holds that *the higher the level of the change in popular perception of insecurity, the more susceptible the public becomes to extremist mobilization*. Most studies in this regard have focused primarily on individual preferences regarding the effectiveness of collective action (Marwell & Oliver, 1993; McAdam, 1986). However, in the case of politico-religious activities there are additional dynamics beyond individual calculations. An important dynamic that is often overlooked is the hope-threat dynamic. The violent reaction of a religious community to crisis is not only a result of individual decision, but also of a collective process within which political, social, and religious differences emerge. Within this context, a religious violent reaction might be a result of perceived threat as well as of perceived revival. One of the ramifications of the Iranian revolution was the revival of sectarianism, which led to revolutionary activities among Sunnis and Shiites alike. While it

promised Shiite minorities the hope of domination, it posed a threat to traditional and politically active Sunnis. The perceived hope-threat dynamic in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution has impacted the mobilization of young generations from both sects. A watershed crisis by itself, however, may not be enough to change the public perception of insecurity. An articulated coherent interpretation of what the crisis means to a specific society is essential in order to bring about the change in popular perception.

### ***The Role of Extremist Political Entrepreneurs***

In contrast to traditional religious scholars, who interpret religious texts to maintain orthodox religious practices, politico-religious entrepreneurs use religion to shape the public's worldview. Unfortunately, due to the conservative nature of traditional scholars, politico-religious entrepreneurs dominate the public sphere during crisis situations. Furthermore, their education and interest in world affairs make politico-religious activists more equipped than the traditional theologians to take up the task of explaining new political events. It is not a coincidence that the most revolutionary theories in the modern history of the Islamic political movement were articulated by philosophers (e.g., Syyed Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ali Shariati, the ideologue of the Iranian revolution) rather than theologians.

In Saudi Arabia, like other Islamic and Western countries, the activities of Islamic politico-religious activists were facilitated first by the fact that they cleverly operated within the grand strategies of containing nationalism and communism. As Al-Huzaimi explains, within the Islamic conservative and Western blocs, politico-religious activists enjoyed more room to assert their influence than nationalists and socialists.<sup>15</sup> Although they were not directly supported by

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<sup>15</sup> Author's interview with Naser Al-Huzaimi.

their host states, Islamic political entrepreneurs were blessed by political events that created a parallel universe within which they pursued their agendas without clashing with the host states.

In Saudi Arabia, in particular, the activities of Sunni politico-religious activists predated the Iranian revolution. The politically-savvy Islamic exiles had managed to infiltrate the Saudi religious circles without drawing the government's attention since the 1960s. The interaction between those exiles and the Saudi conservative religious students produced a new extremist current within which the JSM emerged. The role of extremist political entrepreneurs in shaping the political ideology of the new Islamic generations cannot be overstated. However, an important dimension in this process, which is often overlooked, is their role as articulate interpreters of new political developments.

In the wake of the Iranian revolution, two interpretations instigated the violent acts that followed. The first was the view of the JSM that interpreted the event as a downturn in Islamic history and an indication that the world is coming to an end. Their best course of action was to seize the Grand Mosque and call people to pay allegiance to their appointed Mahdi. Such a notion was alien to the Saudi society. The failure of the JSM's activists to articulate a coherent interpretation of the shift in the politico-religious climate alienated the public and brought the group to an end.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, Shiite activists were more successful with weaving the Iranian revolution in with popular notions ingrained in the psyche of Shiite communities. Although not all of them believed in Khomeini's political theory, Shiite activists framed the revolution as a revival of

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<sup>16</sup> Within the wider Sunni movement, there were more effective interpretations articulated by thinkers such as Abdullah Azam of the MB. However, mainstream Sunni movements did not rebel against the governments in the Islamic world. Instead, they continued to align themselves with the state-led anti-communism movement, particularly the jihad in Afghanistan, which can be considered as a revolution in its own right. These dynamics will be discussed in the next chapter.

Shiitism, a notion cherished by not only Shiites, but every religious minority. As Eastvold (2006) notes,

In the wake of a watershed event, a shattered worldview is replaced by another worldview (or partially replaced by several of them). A worldview is accepted when individuals begin to view it as the best way to explain the relationship between their core values and the outside world (p. 60).

The absence of any form of Sunni militancy after the takeover of the grand Mosque and the proliferation of Shiite militant organizations throughout the 1980s highlight the importance of the role of activists as interpreters. The way activists and leaders interpreted the situation in 1979 to their constituencies resulted in this vast variation in their mobilization for violence. This result is in line with hypothesis (H3) that holds that *the more coherent the opposition's interpretation of the crisis, the more effective its mobilization efforts are*.

### ***The State's Response***

The Saudi government's response at this stage can be divided into two responses: the first to the JSM and the second to the Iranian-supported violence. Both responses were law enforcement reactions rather than counterterrorism strategies. Saudi authorities conducted standard police investigations and made mass arrests rather than pursuing a comprehensive program of demobilization, reeducation, and rehabilitation. According to a Saudi official, counterterrorism strategies did not exist in the Kingdom during the 1980s simply because terrorism was not a threat during that time.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dr Abdulrahman Al-Hadlaq, an advisor to HRH the Assistance Minister of Interior for Security Affairs.

The Saudi response to the radical activities of the JSM began with a crackdown on the group for distributing anti-state pamphlets in 1978. The crackdown was part of a normal security measure taken to ban the illegal distribution of unauthorized publications. The fact that the JSM was not involved in militant activities at this stage led the authorities to underestimate the threat of the radical group and released individuals who were not involved in the pamphlets issue. This, in turn, granted the marginalized group a celebrity-like status within the extremist community.<sup>18</sup> However, the Saudi authorities' response to the takeover of the Grand Mosque was swift. After the incident, the perpetrators received the maximum penalty according to the Shariah law. As a result, the JSM and its ideology ended after the takeover episode. The takeover of the Grand Mosque was not only the first and last violent incident committed by the JSM, but also the end of the JSM itself. Although the JSM's apocalyptic ideology attracted a number of young recruits, the death of the supposed Mahdi in the early days of the rampage—which contradicts the prophecy—exposed the frailty of the ideology. The death of their Mahdi and the innocent blood they shed in the sacred site shocked the zealots, let alone the Islamic masses. The time, place, and the apocalyptic scenario of the attack on the Holy Mosque were a recipe for suicide for any revolutionary movement. This, in turn, had made the Saudi response to the incident easier.

After the Iranian revolution, Saudi Arabia was one of the first governments to congratulate and acknowledge the new government in Tehran in 1979. Even when Khomeini targeted the Kingdom with his propaganda, the Saudi authorities ignored his calls for revolution and tried to contain the Iranian activities during the Hajj. However, when they resorted to violence to spoil the Hajj, the Saudi authorities cracked down on Iranians and their proxies. Like

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Al-Huzaimi.

the JSM's militants, Iranian-supported militants, who were convicted of killing pilgrims, received the maximum penalty.

The Saudi response to the Iranian propaganda and violence came on two different levels: operational and strategic. First, at the operational level, Saudi authorities have been keen to enforce the Hajj regulations and bring to justice anybody who tries to spoil the sacred gathering. At the strategic level, the Iranian propaganda and attempts to delegitimize the Saudi state and its efforts to organize the Hajj triggered a religious cold war between the two countries. The Saudi operational response was effective in stabilizing the Kingdom and saving the lives of millions of pilgrims. However, the regional political developments that followed had a greater impact on the course of this wave of violence. Developments such as the Iraq-Iran war conditioned the Iranian-supported violence and alienated the Arab extremists from Iran. Thus, in this case, there is a little support for hypothesis (H4), which holds that: *Effective state's counterterrorism terrorism efforts, rather than the course of the crisis, shorten the duration of terrorist campaigns.*

## **Conclusion**

In 1979, Saudi Arabia was at the center of the overlap of domestic and regional transformations. On the one hand, the domestic transformation from traditional to modern economic, political, and educational systems provided Saudi younger generations with better economic and educational opportunities. However, this transformation brought with it the influx of immigrant workers as well as the outrage of traditionalists. On the other hand, the regional political transformation coupled with the growth in the Saudi economy had driven religious activists in particular, who were persecuted in their countries, to the Kingdom. The regional transformation culminated with the Iranian revolution, which altered not only the Saudi political

preferences, but also the public perception toward the political role of religion in the new regional security environment.

According to the findings of this chapter, the direct ideological impact of the religious revolution in Iran on the mobilization for violence in general was not as expected. Although it had a direct impact on the mobilization of Shiites, it had a limited impact on Sunni militants. The general impact of the Iranian revolution was not ideological, but rather stemmed from the crisis situation it created, within which a number of dynamics came into play to revolutionize religious extremism. It marked a paradigm shift in the psyche of not only the Islamic public, but also politico-religious organizations and governments. The change in public perception toward the feasibility and effectiveness of religious collective action and the lessons learned from the religious revolution facilitated the mobilization efforts of politico-religious entrepreneurs.

Ironically, the crisis created by the Iranian revolutionary policies directed the political reactions of Western and Islamic states in a way that indirectly served the politico-religious entrepreneurs. Appalled by the key political developments in 1979 such as the Iranian revolution and the Soviet-Afghan War, Islamic and Western countries viewed supporting Saddam Hussein against Khomeini and the Afghan Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union as self-evident political necessities. On the other side, Khomeini used Shiism to undermine such efforts. These dynamics created two parallel militant currents in opposite directions, Shiite and Sunni, which would rise and subside based on the regional political climate rather than their religious doctrines.



## **Chapter 5 - The Gulf War in 1990: Revolution in Reverse**

Terrorism hit Saudi Arabia once again in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1990. The war was a crucial turning point in not only the evolution of violent extremism, but also regional and international politics. In addition to the fact that it altered the order within the Islamic world, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the northeast part of Saudi Arabia was the greatest direct threat in the modern history of Saudi Arabia. At the international level, the Gulf War in 1990 marked the shift from the bipolar to the multi-polar world paradigm. The new paradigm was manifested in the international coalition formed during the war, which was the largest international coalition since the Second World War. More importantly, these dynamics during the Gulf crisis led to a radical shift in the relationship between state and non-state actors in the region.

After the retreat of communism, the Gulf War in 1990 marked the end of the coexistence phase between Islamic politico-religious movements and the anti-Soviet states that had begun since the 1960s. This division came as a result of not only the collapse of the common enemy, but also the transformation to a new international strategic paradigm and the self-sufficiency of most of the non-state actors. By 1990, militant groups reached operational capabilities that—in their views—would enable them to rebel against the new world order. Saudi Arabia in particular was at the center of the Gulf crisis and consequently a primary target of the extremist rebellion.

This chapter examines the impact of the Gulf crisis on the mobilization for violence in Saudi Arabia throughout the 1990s. While Chapter Four traced the evolution of Shiite militant groups and the rise and fall of Sunni traditional militants, this chapter sheds light on the salience of the Shiite revolutionary current as well as the evolution of transnational jihadi groups. In addition to further testing the hypotheses considered in Chapter Four, I test the international

military intervention hypothesis (**H5**), which holds that: *international military intervention increases the transnational mobilization for violence.*

In the following section, I provide background of the Afghan jihad's key role in the evolution of the jihadi groups. In the next section, I examine the international and regional environments before and after the breakout of the 1990 Gulf War. The third section examines the Saudi domestic environment during the crisis within which the opposition to the international coalition emerged. The fourth and fifth sections examine the two major terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996. Finally, the hypotheses will be discussed and the chapter will be concluded.

### **The Afghan Jihad and Saudi Arabia**

After the Iranian revolution, the religious revolutionary activities attracted the attention of the two vying superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. In their zero-sum game of the Cold War, another revolution meant losing (or gaining) a periphery state. For instance, though the new government in Tehran is not pro-communist, it overthrew Shah Pahlavi, a key ally of the United States. In the words of the leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev: "Tendencies of a not particularly positive character have lately surfaced in Iran... But we also understand something else: The Iranian Revolution has undercut the military alliance between Iran and the USA" (Savranskaya, 2001, p. 3).

In Afghanistan, when religious revolutionaries embarked on a power struggle against the socialist ruling party, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the Soviet Union increased its support to the PDPA. In return, the US President, Jimmy Carter, signed a finding authorizing covert aid to the Islamic rebels in July 1979 (Savranskaya, 2001). The Soviets

responded by escalating their campaign into a full military intervention to prevent the collapse of the communist government in December 1979 (Kepel, 2002).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan sent ripples of fear and uncertainty throughout the region. For Saudi Arabia, in particular, as Prince Turki Al-Faisal, the former Director General of the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate, describes it, “it was obvious that the invasion of Afghanistan was one step toward reaching other countries, especially Pakistan, and then moving on to the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula” (Interview with Arab News, 2001). As a result, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and other Islamic countries joined the on-going U.S. operation to aid the Afghan mujahedeen.

Despite the religious frame, the Afghan jihad was first and foremost a political phenomenon. It was initiated by states and carried out by activists with political agendas. Blessed by the supporting states, politico-religious entrepreneurs conceptualized the struggle against the “godless” Soviet Union as an individual religious duty. In addition to the ant-Soviet states’ support, the mobilization efforts of the politic-religious entrepreneurs were facilitated by two other factors. First, the Afghan jihad coincided with the increasing fervor of religious revolution across the region in the early 1980s. Second, Afghanistan became a refuge for religious revolutionaries who were cracked down upon in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the Makkah incident.

In Saudi Arabia, in particular, where politico-religious activities were banned, extremist activists viewed the Afghan cause as a light at the end of the tunnel. Revolutionary activists saw in the Afghan jihad not only a refuge from the Saudi government crackdown following the Makkah incident, but also a hope for reconnecting with the Muslim masses after the atrocity committed by the extremists in Makkah. Despite their ideological differences with the anti-

Soviet states, politico-religious activists exploited the governmental and public support to the Afghan cause. In Saudi Arabia, they blended their activities with a fundraising campaign in the Kingdom during which they recruited a number of wealthy Saudis. Among them was a rich engineering student named Osama Bin Ladin, who later became the leader of the global terrorist organization Al-Qaeda.

In contrast to the enthusiastic religious activists, the conservative religious establishment in Saudi Arabia was very suspicious of the revolutionary calls for taking up arms and fighting in Afghanistan. Although they encouraged financial aid to the Afghan people and acknowledged their right to defend their land, Saudi senior ulama did not advocate a global recruitment for jihad. As Thomas Heggharmmer (2010), an expert on the jihad movement, notes:

Perhaps the only part of the Saudi state which was somewhat hesitant about encouraging young men to fight in Afghanistan was the religious establishment. A common misperception in the historiography of this period is to present the Wahhabi religious scholars as prime movers behind the mobilization to Afghanistan. In fact, very few, if any, of the scholars in the religious establishment actively promoted the Afghani jihad as an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) for Saudis (p. 28).

Recruitment to the Afghani jihad in Saudi Arabia started as fundraising activities which were run by governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Prince Turki Al-Faisal, who was in charge of the Saudi efforts in Afghanistan, recalls that Osama Bin Ladin, in particular, went to Afghanistan for the first time to contribute to road-building. He stresses that Bin Ladin “contributed in doing other construction work for the mujahedeen, but he was not a combatant. Almost 99% of the Arabs and the other volunteers who came to the jihad in those days were not

combatants” (Inside the Kingdom, 2002). The same argument is echoed by Thomas Hegghammer (2010) in his study of the jihad recruitment in Saudi Arabia. Saudis who went to Afghanistan early in the 1980s, Hegghammer notes, “were mostly aid workers and administrators. The military involvement came later and was above all the result of the entrepreneurship of Abdullah Azzam” (p.40). Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian member of the Muslim Brotherhood who migrated between Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, was one of the most influential politico-religious entrepreneurs who articulated the Afghan jihad as an individual duty (Azzam, 1990; Hegghammer, 2010). Azzam was a lecturer at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 1980, where he recruited a number of students including Bin Ladin. The activities of Azzam and other political entrepreneurs who left the Kingdom for Afghanistan were sustained by a number of their Saudi religious students, who came to be known as *jeel asahwah*, the generation of the awakening. Like the JSM in the 1970s, the Sahwah preachers criticized the traditional ulama for not being enthusiastic about the Afghan jihad.

At the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, the anti-Soviet states succeeded in not only defeating the Soviet Union, but also putting the first nail in the coffin of the Soviet Empire. However, the extremist activists also succeeded in establishing the Taliban government and a base of well-trained militants in Afghanistan. More importantly, they succeeded in politicizing a new generation of religious youth (Hegghammer, 2010). With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the proliferation of rogue states, which served as sanctuaries and operational bases for militants, leaders of the mujahedeen felt that they were able to play a major role in the region’s new order.

## **The Gulf Crisis in 1990**

The collapse of the Cold War order impacted not only the behavior of nation states, but also the proliferation of non-state extremist actors. In the new environment, militant organizations found safe havens and training camps in weak states that slipped into civil wars and chaos. Also, states with expansion ambitions broke free of the cold-war repercussions to pursue their expansionist aspirations. The leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, who had been supported—and restrained—by both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, turned against his oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait. Saddam's adventure in Kuwait, as Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman (1992) describe it, was a direct result of the collapse of the Cold War order. They explain that:

With the loss of the Soviet sphere of influence there is a concomitant evaporation of restraint imposed by the Cold War institutions and Cold War fears in the third world and in much of eastern Europe. The risk that confrontations will engage the superpowers is greatly reduced because they are no longer vying with one another. Under such conditions, the expected cost of expansionist policies by minor states are likely to drop from their previous levels. Diminished costs make adventuresome policies more attractive. This, we believe, is why Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990 and not sooner (p. 258).

After occupying Kuwait on August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein built up his army on the Saudi-Kuwaiti borders in an attempt to march toward the nearby Saudi oil fields. If he had been able to annex the oil-rich Saudi Eastern Province, Saddam Hussein would have controlled most of the world's oil. By invading Kuwait, Saddam created a regional and international crisis

situation. In addition to its global strategic and economic impact, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait led to a deep division among states in the region over the crisis and how to solve it. At the public level, the crisis caused a radical shift in the psyche of the Arab and Islamic publics. An Islamic Arab country invading its Islamic Arab neighbor changed the way people perceived their unity, security, and sovereignty.

Despite its impact on international and regional orders, the most profound impact of the 1990 Gulf crisis was that it reversed the revolutionary tide of the Islamic movements. Islamic movements led by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood rebelled against their conservative allies and joined Saddam Hussein in his misadventure. Although he was known as the most secular Arab ruler, Saddam won the support of Islamic extremists during the Gulf crisis by linking his occupation of Kuwait to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. He contended that he would not withdraw from Kuwait until the Israelis withdrew from the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem (Brinkley, 1990). Furthermore, Saddam Hussein used the same religious argument when Saudi Arabia decided to host an international coalition to free Kuwait. He portrayed the presence of the international coalition forces as an occupation of the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Medina.

In response, Islamic activists in Yemen, Sudan, Jordan, and Libya took the streets demonstrating against the international coalition. Although Islamic activists organized and mobilized these demonstrations, their activities were facilitated by the position of their host states, which favored Saddam's aggression against Kuwait. Ironically, other Islamic groups such as the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami and the Afghan Hezb-e-Islami, who owe their rise to the financial support of Kuwait and other Gulf States during the Afghan jihad, sided with Saddam against the international coalition (Kepel, 2002). While the position of most Islamic oppositions

was rhetorical, some extremist elements would call for violence against the international coalition forces.

### **The Domestic Environment in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s**

After the influential politico-religious entrepreneurs left Saudi Arabia for Afghanistan in the late 1980s, their Saudi disciples took their place. The religious scene in the Kingdom was dominated by young preachers who came to be known as the Sahwah generation. Sahwah's political rhetoric was in part a result of the ideological impact of their mentors; however, it was also related to the politicized climate of religious fervor in the region following the Iranian revolution and during the Afghan jihad. Additionally, Saudi traditional conservative ulama continued to shy away from discussing political issues, leaving an intellectual vacuum in the public political debate. Furthermore, preaching had not yet been institutionalized in Saudi Arabia. Preachers from outside the official religious establishment were allowed to express their views through lectures and religious sermons. Like their politico-religious mentors, the sahawah preachers were outspoken and active within the youth community. At first, their socio-religious activities were encouraged by the traditional ulama. However, in the wake of the Gulf crisis, the two generations had different positions.

Appalled by Saddam's aggression and the reaction of Islamic organizations that sided with him; the Saudi ulama strongly condemned the aggression and supported the Saudi government's decision to host the international coalition. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz, the most influential religious figure in the modern history of Saudi Arabia, argues that Muslims should not disagree on a clear matter such as this aggression. He explains that:

This is one of the strife and incidents that show the foe from the friend. It splits people to righteous and unrighteous ... fair and unfair. The duty of the believer



during this type of adversity is to be with justice against the unjust ... in this strife, it is clear that the ruler of Iraq is unjust aggressor against a sovereign Muslim state (Interview with Al-Muslimoon Newspaper, 1994).

The Arab League and the Islamic World League also supported the Saudi decision to host an international coalition after calling in vain for the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. At the end of the International Islamic Conference held in Makkah on August 23, 1990, Muslim leaders and ulama declared that “the principles of Shariah require saving lives and properties ... the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait is a flagrant violation to the rights and principles that Islam preserves” (1990, p. 105).

A number of Sahwah preachers, however, were not enthusiastic about the Saudi decision to host the international coalition. Instead, they opened the issue for debate warning against the ramifications of hosting an armed coalition of thirty four nations. During the crisis, the Saudi government tolerated the Sahwah preachers’ position as they continued to stress a peaceful national dialogue. However, the jihad veterans, who belonged to neither the Sahwah nor the traditional establishment, had a different course of action in mind. Bin Laden, in particular, offered to use his connections with the global mujahedeen to form a mujahedeen force to free Kuwait. When the Saudi government turned down his offer, Bin Ladin rebelled. In the words of Prince Turki Al-Faisal, who explains the official view of Bin Ladin’s position:

Firstly, he [Bin Ladin] believed that he was capable of preparing an army to challenge Saddam’s forces. Secondly, he opposed the Kingdom’s decision to call friendly forces. By doing so, he disobeyed the ruler and violated the fatwa of senior Islamic scholars, who had endorsed the plan as an essential move to fight injustice and aggression (Interview with Arab News, 2001).

In March 1992, Bin Ladin left Saudi Arabia for Pakistan to launch an opposition campaign against the Kingdom. Then, he accepted the invitation extended by Dr. Hassan Al-Turabi, the leader of the National Islamic Front in Sudan. After coming to power through a military coup d'état in 1989, the Sorbonne-educated religious ideologue dreamed of a French-like revolution in the Islamic world (Rabasa, et al., 2006). Al-Turabi's role in politicizing religious extremism in the region cannot be overstated. During the Gulf crisis, he sided with Saddam Hussein and led the religious opposition, which included groups from the Arab world, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Kepel, 2004). Bin Ladin was an important asset to Al-Turabi's coalition. With Bin Ladin's money and Al-Turabi's vision, they established the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC). The London-headquartered ARC was instrumental in propagating their radical message and inciting a global violent campaign (Rabasa, et al., 2006).

Bin Ladin used the ARC to connect with jihad veterans everywhere. Messages written or recorded on cassettes in his office in London would be sent to schools, mosques, newspapers, and radio stations all over the world. Like the JSM in 1979, Bin Ladin targeted the Saudi government and traditional ulama criticizing their management of the crisis. In response, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, strongly condemned Bin Ladin and his international extremist allies. He warned against activists with weak religious credentials, who, as he describes them, "whisper secretly in their meetings and record their poison over cassettes distributed to the people" (Jehl, 1999). In order to get some credible publicity, Bin Ladin tried to align his propaganda with the Sahwah's position. Despite the clear ideological difference between him and the Sahwah preachers, Bin Ladin started to quote them, praise their moral bravery, and defend their position. This, in turn, put the Sahwah in a dilemma. Although they

voiced some reservations about the approach of the government and the ulama to the crisis, Sahwah preachers were against Bin Ladin's calls for violence.

The position of the Sahwah preachers coupled with the free-riding of Bin Ladin's ARC, created confusion within not only the Saudi religious community, but also the government. When the authorities cracked down on Bin Ladin's operatives, a number of hard-line Sahwah preachers were among those arrested. The arrests of a number of Sahwah prominent preachers and jihad veterans complicated the issue and provided the outside opposition with an opportunity to recruit inside the Kingdom. While the Sahwah movement in general remained peaceful, few jihad veterans were willing to answer Bin Ladin's calls for violence.

### **Olaya Bombing in 1995**

In February 1991, the coalition forces freed Kuwait in a five-day operation. The swift operation with minimal civilian casualties eased the tension against the war. It also increased the public's pro-coalition attitude (Alkhedr, 2010). As a result, some oppositions, including the Muslim Brotherhood, started to moderate their position. However, others like Bin Ladin's ARC had reached a point of no return. Like Saddam Hussein in the beginning of the crisis, Bin Ladin dismissed the operation to free Kuwait and framed the presence of the coalition forces in Saudi Arabia as an occupation. This frame became a rallying point for all extremist groups who opposed the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, in particular, for whatever reason. Although it did not attract public support in Saudi Arabia, this slogan resonated more among the international jihad veterans community.

This was the result of a number of factors. First, the jihad veterans were products of the Afghan jihad, which was built on an anti-imperialism platform. In their view, jihad was an anti-occupation struggle. Therefore, it was easy for the jihad ideologues to interpret the presence of

forces from thirty four nations in Saudi Arabia, the guardian of the Two Holy Mosques, as an occupation. The second factor is the timing of the crisis. In 1990, the common bond and structure built during the Afghan jihad among international mujahedeen were still intact. Through their written and audio publications, neo-jihad leaders were able to propagate their message and influence a large number of jihad veterans into action.

On November 13, 1995, an explosive expert jihad veteran, with the help of three others, detonated a 400-lb car bomb outside a U.S. military training facility in Olaya, Riyadh. The attack was only symbolic. The facility downtown Riyadh had nothing to do with the international forces stationed on the Saudi-Kuwaiti borders. It housed a U.S. training mission that had been working with the Saudi National Guard since the 1970s. As a result of the explosion, seven people died, including five Americans, and sixty were injured (Car Bombing in Riyadh, 1995). In the following days, a number of non-existent groups such as the Islamic Movement for Change, the Tigers of the Gulf, and the International Justice Group claimed responsibility for the attack.

These false claims, however, vanished when the Saudi security authorities captured four Saudi young men who confessed to having carried out the attack independently. Three of the perpetrators, Muslih Al-Sahmrani, Ryadh Al-Hajri, and Khalid Al-Saeed, were jihad veterans. They confessed that they were inspired by Bin Ladin's calls to take action, but had no direct connection to his organization. The fourth, Abdul Aziz Al-Muathem, was a disciple and close friend of the extremist Jordanian, Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi. According to Al-Mauthem, he visited Al-Maqdisi in his prison in Jordan prior to the attack (Aljazeera Interview with Al-Maqdisi, 2005; Olaya Bombing, 1996). Al-Maqdisi was one of the migrant sheikhs who migrated from Palestine to Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan during the Afghan jihad.

He influenced Bin Ladin and later mentored Al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, Abu Musaab Al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi is infamous for his *takfir* (excommunication) theories in which he views governments in the Islamic world, and Saudi Arabia in particular, as apostate. His theories served as a link between revolutionary extremism and the jihad ideology.

Al-Maqdisi and other extremists believed in violent opposition; however, they did not participate in organized violence in the early 1990s. Their impact was ideological rather than operational. Even Bin Ladin, although he praised the perpetrators as heroes, did not claim responsibility for the attack in Riyadh. In an interview with Peter Arnett of CNN, Bin Ladin stated that "what they did is a great job and a big honor that I missed participating in" (Arnett, 1997). The division among extremist groups followed by their false claims in the aftermath of the attack reflects the chaotic state of the leaderless mujahedeen community in the mid-1990s. It also indicates that their mother organization, Al-Qaeda, had not become operational by that time. The violent reaction of a small number of jihad veterans, in Saudi Arabia in particular, was a result of their chaotic state of mind rather than organized activities. Mansour Alnogaidan, a former Saudi extremist who shared a prison cell with other jihad veterans in the early 1990s, argues that the vacuum left by the imprisonment of prominent Sahwah sheikhs opened the door for radical changes within the Sahwah youth community. While some youth, who were influenced by extremists with weak religious credentials, moved to the extreme right, others like him, in his view, became reformists (Alnogaidan, 2003).

The Olaya terrorist attack, however, was a wakeup call for the Saudi traditional ulama. In the aftermath of the attack, the Saudi Council of Senior Ulama issued a statement calling this type of act a violation of Islam's strong prohibition of killing and terrorizing innocent people. In their statement, the ulama issued a fatwa saying such a terrorist attack was a crime against not

only Saudi Arabia, but also humanity in general. Furthermore, the ulama warned the Muslim youths against following evil ideologies cloaked in religious disguise (Senior Ulama Condemn Olaya Bombing, 1995). On the Friday prayer sermon at the Holy Mosque in Makkah, Sheikh Abdurrahman Al-Sudees explained that killing innocent human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims, was one of the greatest sins in Islam. At the end of his sermon, imam Al-Sudees called for the Saudi Supreme Court to inflict upon the terrorist perpetrators the maximum punishment permitted by Islamic law (Senior Ulama Condemn Olaya Bombing, 1995). After a televised confession broadcasted on the Saudi TV, the four terrorists were executed in May 1996.

As a result of the government's fierce crackdown, a number of violent extremists went underground while the vast majority got out of the Kingdom and joined the outside opposition. By 1996, Bin Ladin was running training camps in Afghanistan and recruited most of those who took the latter path. Bin Ladin, however, was not alone in this sentiment during that time. Different religious extremist groups, Sunni and Shiite, jumped on the political wave of the Gulf crisis to achieve different—in most cases opposing—political ends. On March 28, 1996, Fadel Al-Alawe, a Saudi Shiite, attempted to smuggle thirty-eight kilograms of explosives into the Kingdom. During the investigations, Al-Alawe admitted that the explosives-loaded car had been given to him in Lebanon (Freeh, 2005). The arrest of Al-Alawe led to the arrest of his Shiite extremist cell, which was plotting a terrorist attack on the Saudi Eastern Province. However, those arrested were only the vanguard of another type of threat.

### **The Khobar Terrorist Attack in 1996**

Despite the interception of the explosive shipment and the arrest of the sleeping cell, a 3000-lb tanker bomb exploded outside the perimeter of Khobar Towers on June 26, 1996. These eight-story buildings housed coalition forces personnel who remained in the Kingdom to enforce

the UN cease-fire resolution and monitor the no-fly zone over Iraq. The explosion left a Saudi and 19 U.S. airmen dead and 386 of other nationalities injured (Grant, 1998; Shenon, 1996; BuAli & Sadiq, 1996).

As in the aftermath of the Olaya attack, a number of unknown organizations claimed responsibility for the Khobar attack. Bin Ladin did not claim responsibility; however, he stated that he had “great respect for the people who did this action” (Arnett, 1997). In a departure from the norm during the past terrorist incidents in the Kingdom, a Shiite group, which named itself Saudi Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for the attack. This claim, coupled with the striking resemblance between the Khobar attack and the attack on the U.S. Marines barracks in Lebanon in 1983, pointed to Hezbollah and Iran. Iran was one of the countries that vehemently opposed the international coalition. It sent a religious delegation to participate in the religious opposition conference led by Al-Turabi in Sudan. Although Iran opposed Saddam’s hegemonic attempt, it also opposed the increasing American role in the region, especially any further rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. In the midst of international speculations, Iran was quick to deny any involvement in the attack and accused Israel and the U.S. of attempting to distort its image in the region (Alyahyawi, 1996).

In the attack’s aftermath, the Saudi authorities arrested a number of Sunni and Shiite suspects. Although the Saudi-U.S. joint investigation team made significant progress, it never announced the results of its investigations. However, official reports from different agencies pointed to the connection between a Saudi Hezbollah cell and the Hezbollah international terrorist organization in Lebanon. One of the latest reports is an American federal indictment announced by Attorney General John Ashcroft on June 21, 2001. The indictment indicted thirteen Saudi Shiites and a Lebanese explosives engineer for the Khobar attack (United States

District Court , 2001). According to the indictment, the terrorist cell was part of Hezbollah international organization which is “inspired, supported, and directed by elements of the Iranian government” (p. 2). Despite the progress of the Saudi-U.S. efforts to bring the perpetrators of the Khobar bombing to justice, these efforts were devastated and overshadowed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks that took place two months after the announcement of the indictment.

### **The Impact of the 1990 Gulf Crisis on Violent Extremism**

The 1990 Gulf crisis took place at a critical juncture in international and regional politics. At the international level, the 1990 Gulf War marked the end of the Cold War and the world’s shift from a bipolar to multi-polar system. This transformation was to replace the nuclear balance of terror with international security and economic cooperation. Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait was one of a series of conflicts that broke out in the beginning of the post-Cold War era. However, the importance of the Gulf region to the world economy coupled with the international political will for international security cooperation prompted the formation of a large international coalition. At the regional level, the magnitude of the Gulf crisis altered the Islamic world order and created a deep division among Arab states in particular. While the Gulf States, which supported Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran, had to turn against him, other Arab states like Libya, Sudan, and Yemen reluctantly sided with him.

Despite its immense impact on international and regional state-actors, the Gulf crisis had a greater impact on Islamic militant organizations. The Gulf crisis was a turning point in their transformation from jihad in Afghanistan to a borderless terrorism. Its impact on violent extremism was facilitated by both organizational and systemic factors. First, the crisis coincided with the influx of the well-trained Arab mujahedeen from Afghanistan. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union gave these holy



warriors the illusion that they could play a role in the new regional order. Second, the collapse of the Cold War order in the early 1990s gave rise to religious extremist governments such as that of the National Islamic Front in Sudan and the Taliban in Afghanistan. These states provided violent extremist mujahedeen with safe havens and training camps.<sup>19</sup> Third, the presence of the largest international coalition since the Second World War in Saudi Arabia, the land of the Two Holy Mosques, inflamed the religious sentiment across the region. This religious sentiment was instrumental in mobilizing religious extremists from all over the Islamic world into a global terrorist campaign. It also was exploited by extremist elements in the Iranian government, who viewed the increasing U.S. presence and rapprochement with the Gulf States as a threat. The sudden eruption of terrorism perpetrated by jihad veterans and Saudi Hezbollah in the aftermath of the 1990 Gulf crisis supports the study's core hypothesis (**H1**), which holds that *the Gulf War in 1990 had a major impact on the evolution of violent extremism*. In addition to its general impact on states and non-state actors, the 1990 Gulf War created a crisis situation, within which dynamics discussed in the next section led to mobilization for a global violent campaign.

### ***The Change in Public Perception***

The ramifications of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait go beyond instability in the region. In addition to the shattering effect of the crisis on the inter-Arab relations, it shifted the public perception of threat and unity. For decades before Saddam's aggression, people across the region perceived the threat as coming from colonialism, communism, or imperialism. The invasion of a Muslim Arab country by another was a paradigm shift in the state as well as the public perception of threat. At the root of the new paradigm was a deep public sense of vulnerability

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that not all mujahedeen were violent extremists. The vast majority of the 1980s mujahedeen did not join Bin Ladin's terrorist campaign in the 1990s.

and insecurity. Kuwait was gone within a day and the threat was mounting along the Saudi borders. The arrival of foreign forces to stabilize the region exacerbated this feeling and added another dimension to the crisis.

In contrast to other political developments such as the Iranian revolution or the Soviet-Afghan war, which concerned only a small fraction of the Saudi people, the Gulf crisis put the whole country in defensive mode. For the first time, Saudis experienced an international war involving thirty-four nations heralded with unprecedented media coverage. The lack of independent political and academic institutions in Saudi Arabia intensified the public feeling of uncertainty. As a result, the religious institutions stepped in, in an attempt to interpret the event and ease tension. While the official religious establishment supported the Saudi decision to host the international coalition, Sahwah preachers, though they did not oppose the decision, opened it for debate (Alkhedr, 2010). However, debating a national security issue during a crisis situation like this was a red-line that triggered a government crackdown on outspoken Sahwah preachers.

In reaction to the arrest of a number of Sahwah preachers, a group of Saudi religious and academic scholars established the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). As its name implies, the CDLR was established, presumably, to plead the case of outspoken religious preachers. However, as soon as it promoted a political identity, religious founders abandoned the CDLR and the government banned it according to the law that bans political organizations in the Kingdom. The remaining founders relocated to London to wage a campaign against the Saudi government. Although the CDLR does not represent the Sahwah, establishing such an organization in the Kingdom reflects the change in the Saudi public attitude during the crisis.

The Shiite community as well was divided over how to deal with the crisis. While Hassan Asffar, who was during that time leading a Shiite opposition from London, called his followers to cooperate to defend their country against Saddam's aggression, other Shiite extremists voiced opposition to cooperating with the international coalition. Assafar's position would later grant him an agreement with the Saudi government resulting in him and a number of Shiite opposition leaders coming back to the Kingdom in the late 1990s (Alhatlani, 2009). However, this conciliation pushed the Shiite extremists, who did not accept it, into Iranian hands.

The change in perception toward national rights was not exclusive to the religious community. In a landmark change, Saudi liberal groups, which include intellectuals, businessmen, and journalists, publicly voiced their demands for political reform and freedom of expression. In 1991, a group of Saudi women drove their cars downtown Riyadh in protest against the ban on women driving. Although the liberal group did not involve violence, they joined religious groups in sending letters and petitions demanding political reform to the King of Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup> The unprecedented mobilization of religious extremists (Sunni and Shiite) as well as liberals during the crisis supports the hypothesis (H2) that holds that *the higher the level of the change in popular perception of insecurity, the more susceptible the public becomes to mobilization*. Without the shift in public perception toward national rights, leaders of religious and liberal groups would not be able to exploit the political opportunity during the crisis to mobilize their constituencies.

### ***The Role of Extremist Political Entrepreneurs***

During times of crisis, people try to comprehend its significance and meaning based on not only reality, but also their frame of reference and history. Jonathan Eastvold (2006) notes

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<sup>20</sup> Petition and letter campaigns (Sunni and Shiite) were conducted in 1990, 1991, and 2003.

that “reality shapes action, but the perceptual path between ‘reality’ and one’s understanding of that reality is rarely unclouded” (p. 59). During this analytical process, he argues, the role of interpreters becomes crucial. As mentioned in this chapter, Saudi religious institutions during the Gulf crisis tried to offer an interpretation of the crisis. However, the fact that Saudi religious institutions were not designed and equipped to interpret political developments opened the door for different interpretations. The problem was exacerbated by the conservative nature of the Saudi traditional ulama who, although strongly condemning of Saddam’s aggression, continued to avoid politics. As a result, Sahwah preachers and others from all over the Islamic world dominated the public political debate. However, the arrest of Sahwah leaders left only one extremist interpretation propagated by Bin Ladin and his international extremist allies. In fact, the arrest in itself was one of the arguments Bin Ladin capitalized on to mobilize the Sahwah youth against the Saudi government.

In the aftermath of the arrest, Bin Ladin bombarded mosques, schools, radio stations, and government offices with faxes from his London-based organization. In his letters, Bin Ladin reduced the Gulf crisis to a battle between the Saudi governments and the Muslim “true believers.” In a letter that was faxed immediately after the arrest, Bin Ladin writes:

While we, in the Advice and Reform Committee, condemn this malicious crime, we believe it has a number of implications:

1. The declaration of a blatant war on Islam and Muslims by the Kingdom’s government represented in its attack on preachers...with this, it became obvious that the Kingdom’s government is not different from other secular governments that openly wage war on Islam.

2. This donates the beginning of the execution of a comprehensive and gradual plan by the regime to destroy the Islamic Sahwah and its leaders (Letters from Bin Ladin, 1994).

The same theme was echoed by other Islamic extremists such as the Jourdanian Abu Mohammed Al-Maqdisi, who wrote a book titled *Al-Kawashif Al-Jaliyah fi Kufr Al-Dawlah Al-Sa'udiyah* (the Obvious Proofs of the Saudi State's Impiety). In this book, Al-Maqdisi argues that the strong relationship between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. is proof of the Kingdom's apostasy. Al-Maqdisi's book, which was published in Peshawar, Pakistan, and republished on extremist websites, has been a pillar of the global terrorist campaign against both Saudi Arabia and the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

While Al-Maqdisi had some connections to the Saudi religious community as a preacher, Bin Ladin was an outsider with no religious credentials. However, both men's experience with the Afghan jihad had given them credibility among the global jihad community. More importantly, it enabled them to elicit sympathy from the global jihad community. As a result, their interpretations of the crisis succeeded in moving the jihad veterans despite their limited religious credentials. The influence of their interpretations was manifested in the violence perpetrated by their followers according to their confessions. The fact that the violence during the Gulf crisis came from the followers of those two ideologues in particular rather than the wider religious community supports the hypothesis (**H3**) that holds that *the more coherent the opposition's interpretation of the crisis, the more effective its mobilization efforts are*. The attack committed by the Shiite militants in 1996 was a product of ongoing Iranian mobilization efforts and the internal Shiite division over conciliation with the government. The mobilization of extremists

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Maqdisi's book can be found on almost all the extremist websites such as [www.tawhed.ws](http://www.tawhed.ws).

from both sects was facilitated by another factor that was rooted in their common anti-imperialism ideology, the international military intervention.

### ***International Military Intervention***

Anti-imperialism sentiment has been ingrained in the psyche of the whole region since the end of the Second World War. However, this sentiment reached its extreme during the Soviet-Afghan War. This, in part, was a result of the intensive anti-imperialism campaign launched by the anti-Soviet states. Although the mujahedeen evolved their own anti-imperialism ideology during the Afghan jihad, the strong anti-imperialism sentiment in general served both the mujahedeen leaders and the anti-Soviet states. However, the Gulf crisis revealed the deep ideological division between the mujahedeen and their patron states. When some extremist entrepreneurs opposed the international coalition, the mobilization model was on hand and in the minds of jihad veterans all over the world. The presence of the largest international armed coalition since the Second World War presented the extremist oppositions with an opportunity to transform the mujahedeen's struggle into a global terrorist campaign.

Despite the religious connotation of the call to wage jihad to expel the international coalition from Islam's holiest land, the slogan was constructed by Saddam Hussein, the most secular leader in the region. During the arrival of the coalition forces in Saudi Arabia, Saddam launched a psychological campaign calling Muslims around the world to rise and defend the Two Holy Mosques. In his speech to the Islamic and Arab worlds, Saddam Hussein declared:

Oh, Arabs, Oh, Muslims and believers everywhere, this is your day to rise and defend Mecca, which is captured by the spears of the Americans and the Zionists. Revolt against oppression, corruption, treachery and backstabbing. Keep the foreigner away from your holy shrines (Brinkley, 1990, p. 23).

This slogan was in line with the ideology of politico-religious entrepreneurs, who translated it into a jihad tailored narrative. Bin Ladin, for instance, portrayed Saudi Arabia as “an American colony.” Saudis, he added, “now know their real enemy is America” (Fisk, 2011). This is not to say that Bin Ladin and Saddam had the same ideology. Despite the overlap of their objectives, the two men had opposite worldviews. While Saddam was trying to win the battle in Kuwait, Bin Ladin was calling for a global religious war against imperialism, including Saddam’s. In an interview in 1996, Bin Ladin stated that “we, as Muslims, do not like the Iraqi regime but ... killing those Iraqi children is a crusade against Islam” (Fisk, 2011). The alignment of Saddam’s psychological campaign against the coalition, the jihad anti-imperialism ideology, and the general anti-imperialism sentiment in the region had a major impact on the mobilization for violence during the crisis. The fact that this wave of violence began with two attacks against the coalition bases is in line with the international military intervention hypothesis (**H3**): *international military intervention increases transnational mobilization*. Although this violent wave began as an anti-occupation reaction, it evolved into a global terrorist campaign that targeted civilians in Saudi Arabia, the U.S., and other countries. Factors that contributed to the third wave of violence will be discussed in the next chapter.

### ***The State’s Response***

Until the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia had not developed a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. This, in part, was due to the fact that Saudi authorities considered the JSM’s takeover of the Grand Mosque an aberration rather than a new trend. Also, the Iranian-supported violence had presumably been put under control by law enforcement measures and an increasing rapprochement with the new Iranian government. Even during the early stages of the Gulf crisis, terrorism was not a probable threat.

In the wake of the Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia found itself in the grips of more than one national security threat at the same time. In addition to the Iraqi forces invading the Kingdom's northeastern borders, Saudi Arabia had to deal with millions of Kuwaiti refugees, the arrival of forces from thirty-four nations, and inside as well as outside opposition. These threats put counterterrorism on the back burner during the first three years of the crisis. However, when the war ended, the Saudi government engaged in an after-action reform.

The Saudi government started with gradual political reform that emphasized public participation in the political process. The Saudi Basic Law of Government signed by King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz in 1992 established Majlis Asshura (Consultative Council) and the Provincial Administrations (The Basic Law for the System of Government, 1992). The reform also included education. Religious textbooks written by Muslim Brotherhood thinkers such as Mohammed Qutb and Manaa AlQattan were replaced by textbooks written by Saudi traditional ulama (Alkhedr, 2010). With the little increase in freedom of expression given to the press, some Sahwah preachers overestimated the government's tolerance and continued their inflammatory rhetoric.

In response, the Saudi authorities arrested a number of prominent Sahwah preachers in 1994. The arrest came as a reaction to not only the increasing criticism, but also the pressure from the outside extremist opposition. Although the arrest of outspoken Sahwah preachers toned down the flammable rhetoric inside the Kingdom, some analysts argue that it was an overreaction by the authorities. Abdul Aziz Alkhedr (2010), for instance, argues that the Sahwah's voice during the Gulf crisis was a progressive trend toward having a healthy discussion, which would have defused the tension. Alkhedr's argument is consistent with the progressive role of the Sahwah leaders against violent extremism since their release. Another backlash was that the



absence of the Sahwah leaders from the scene pushed some leaderless Sahwah youths into the hands of the outside opposition.

The Saudi government's response to terrorism in the 1990s, as an expert describes it, was a classical response to terrorism in which the authorities carried out mass arrests of terrorist suspects (Hegghammer, 2010). The steps taken by the Saudi law enforcement agencies stabilized the Kingdom for the decade following the Gulf crisis. However, the fact that extremist entrepreneurs found sanctuaries and training camps in failed states such as Afghanistan and Sudan internationalized the problem. Although the Saudi government stripped Bin Ladin of his Saudi citizenship and declared him an outlaw, the anarchical situation in Afghanistan in the late 1990s offered him and other outlaws a safe heaven.

Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia was one of only three states that recognized the Taliban as a legitimate government in Afghanistan, the Taliban refused to cooperate on extraditing Bin Ladin and other wanted Saudi militants.<sup>22</sup> The two governments had an agreement that the Taliban would turn over Bin Ladin to the Saudi government. However, when Prince Turki Al-Faisal, the Kingdom's special convey, went to Kandahar as planned, he was turned down by the Taliban leader, Mulla Omar. As Prince Turki describes his trip Kandahar:

I wished I had not gone. After previously agreeing to hand the man over, I discovered Mulla Omar had reversed his decision and he was abusive about the Kingdom and its people. Under those circumstances, I had no choice but to break off negotiations. I still remember, however, that as I was leaving, I told Mulla Omar that one day he would regret his decision and that the unfortunate Afghan people would pay the price (Khashoggi, 2001).

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<sup>22</sup> The Taliban government was recognized by only Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan.

In Afghanistan, Bin Ladin built the base or Al-Qaeda in Arabic, from which he prepared and launched terrorist attacks around the world. Al-Qaeda recruited Saudis as well as extremists from all over the world; however, violence inside the Kingdom would peak for the third time in the aftermath of another political development, the Iraq War in 2003.

## **Conclusion**

The Gulf crisis was a turning point in violent extremism in the region. According to the findings of this chapter, the Gulf crisis created most of the hypothesized dynamics driving mobilization for violence. First, the significance and timing of the crisis prompted an international response, which, in turn, divided the Muslim world. The division among states in the region provided extremist organizations with not only strategic depth, from where they could prepare and launch their attacks, but also political and material support. The fact that the crisis took place during a transitional phase in the region gave extremist revolutionaries the hope of a major role in the new order. Second, in contrast to politico-religious entrepreneurs, who saw an opportunity in the crisis, people across the region felt a deep sense of vulnerability. The invasion of a Muslim Arab country by another was a paradigm shift in the public perception of threat. Furthermore, the presence of a large international, armed coalition exacerbated this sense of insecurity and shaped the worldview of a new generation of extremists. This hope-threat dynamic was instrumental in mobilizing not only jihad veterans, but also a new generation of “freedom fighters.”

As shown in this chapter, the Gulf crisis was first and foremost a political rather than religious conflict. Religion was first employed by Saddam Hussein and then by politico-religious entrepreneurs as a psychological tool for mobilization. In Saudi Arabia, in particular, the Saudi public was polarized over the political solution to the crisis. However, none of the Saudi

religious scholars—including Sahwah—opposed the fatwa issued by the Saudi Council of Senior Ulama, which supported the international coalition. The Sahwah preachers challenged the authorities and the traditional ulama on political and social rather than religious ground. They spoke out against the decision of hosting the international coalition based on the negative ramifications, in their view, of pursuing this policy. However, they did not condemn the senior ulama as Bin Ladin did.

The fact that violence was perpetrated by Bin Ladin’s followers rather than extremists from the wider Saudi religious community indicates that violence was driven by a specific jihadi ideology. This ideology, which evolved throughout the Afghan jihad in isolation from the wider Islamic intellectual environment, has been the pillar of the global terrorist campaign since the 1990s. The context for the birth of this violent extremist ideology was the Soviet-Afghan war; however, the Gulf crisis came to provide it with different patrons, a new generation of recruits, and new enemies.

## **Chapter 6 - The Iraq War in 2003**

With the end of the Gulf crisis, a global terrorist campaign began that targeted the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East and Africa. This campaign culminated with the most devastating terrorist attack in history, 9/11. Despite the fact that this terrorist campaign had been waged under the banner of freeing the land of the Two Holy Mosques from the coalition forces, Saudi Arabia remained remarkably stable. What is more puzzling is the fact that terrorism did not hit the Kingdom until the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003 when most of the international forces had already left. What explains this paradox? What was the impact of the 2003 Iraq war on this wave of terrorism?

This chapter traces the evolution of the global terrorist campaign that led to the third wave of violence in the 2000s. It analyzes major terrorist attacks in this period and highlights the ideological and operational changes this campaign has gone through. It starts with a background of the wider extremist community in the Islamic world, within which emerged Al-Qaeda, the name brand of this wave of violence.

### **Background**

The influx of the well-trained politically indoctrinated mujahedeen from Afghanistan in the mid-1990s stirred up armed conflicts in different parts of the Islamic world. However, most of these conflicts were not exclusively driven by a jihadi ideology, but rather conditioned by domestic contextual factors. During this transnational period, each country in the region had its different political, economic, and social environment, within which its mujahedeen veterans either reintegrated or rebelled.

In the early 1990s, while the whole region experienced an economic decline, countries such as Sudan, Algeria, Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia faced political unrest. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, which was devastated by the Gulf crisis, instability in these countries was a result of political conflicts between governments and politico-religious parties, which embarked on struggles to religionize their governments. With their religious slogans, politico-religious parties in these countries co-opted most of the jihad veterans. This, in turn, facilitated the transformation of these power struggles into armed conflicts. These conflicts played a major role in shaping not only the worldview of a new generation of extremists, but also the strategies of politico-religious entrepreneurs. In order to win the support of the jihad veterans, who were indoctrinated into an anti-imperialism ideology, politico-religious entrepreneurs tried to connect their local power struggles with regional political developments.

In the wake of the Gulf crisis, the cofounder of the Front Islamique du Salur (FIS) in Algeria, Ali Belhadj, declared jihad against the international coalition forces. Furthermore, he “demanded the formation of a corps of volunteers to join the forces of Saddam Hussein” (Kepel, 2002, p. 172). A year later in 1991, he led his followers in a bloody civil war against the Algerian government as well as other militant groups.

Another example of this kind of politico-religious co-optation was the National Islamic Front’s (NIF) takeover of Sudan’s government through a coup d’état in 1989. During the Gulf crisis, the architect of the Islamic revolution in Sudan, Hassan Al-Turabi, organized an Islamic conference in opposition to the international coalition. His objective was to boost the position of his new Islamic government within the Islamic world rather than solving the crisis.

The new strategy of thinking locally and acting regionally benefited the FIS and NIF in the short run. By exploiting regional crises as rallying points, they won domestic popular support

for their fights against their governments. However, their politico-religious projects were destined to fail. Algeria's civil war, which left more than 100,000 people dead, ended in 2000 with a victory for the government and a disintegration of most of the extremist organizations (Malty, 2001). In 1999, Sudan became isolated by international economic sanctions, which were imposed as a result of the country's support for terrorism. Under international pressure, conflict erupted between Al-Turabi, the Secretary General of the National Assembly, and Omar Al-Bashir, the President of Sudan. The conflict ended with Al-Turabi, a symbol of the Islamic revolution in Sudan, in prison and Al-Bashir declaring Sudan a secular state (Abdulsalam, 2010). Despite the failure of politico-religious organizations during the 1990s, their transformation of the jihad ideology had a major impact on the mobilization for terrorism in the next decade.

### **Saudi Domestic Environment 1998-2001**

In Saudi Arabia, the situation was different. First, the economic situation in the Kingdom was better than that of the countries mentioned above. Second, in contrast to other governments in the region, the Saudi government maintained a relatively good relationship with the mujahedeen after the Afghan jihad. Saudi authorities did not deal with the Saudi jihad veterans as outlaws who should be cast out and prosecuted. Third, Saudi Arabia did not have politico-religious parties that would co-opt and organize the jihad veterans for political gain. These factors facilitated the reintegration of a number of the Saudi jihad veterans in their society.

During the Gulf crisis in 1990, although the relationship between them and the government became strained, the jihad veterans did not resort to violence until 1995. The violence was a result of both the influence of the outside opposition as well as the escalation of domestic tension, which culminated in the imprisonment of some outspoken sheikhs. However, when the war ended and the imprisoned sheikhs were released, the situation was back to normal.

In fact, religious extremism had receded more from the public sphere in the Kingdom between 1999 and 2001 than at any time since the 1970s. In 1999, the Sahwah sheikhs found themselves in a different political environment than that of the early 1980s. They strongly condemned the atrocities committed by extremists in Algeria and other parts of the Islamic world and called for recanting extremist views. Sheikh Salman Al-Oadah, uncompromising outspoken preacher and author, became a strong proponent of change. He explains his ideological transformation as a normal consequence of the changing environment:

Change, after all, is how we learn to respond correctly to new developments. It is how we move away from blind following and dependence on others towards independent thinking...I spent five years secluded from the influence of society. This gave me freedom – the freedom to escape from the narrowness of circumstances to a broader outlook. It gave me renewed life and allowed me to better appreciate the good in others. When I came back into society, I found that a sector of society had moved towards an aggressive attitude. I had to make my stance against their behavior clear, even though it meant losing their favorable opinion of me...Indeed, I have changed a lot over the years, as well I should. If I was still saying in my forties what I used to say when I was twenty, that would mean I had spent twenty years of my life in vain (Al-Oadah, 2012).

This ideological transformation of symbolic figures like Al-Oadah and others played a major role in isolating the Sahwah generation from the outside opposition represented by Al-Qaeda. Within the Sahwah community, while this ideological transformation prompted a severe criticism from a small number of underground extremists, it gave way to a new phenomenon: the ideological transformation of a number of young extremists into modernists. Former extremists

like Mansour Alnoqaidan and Mishari Althaidy became prolific writers, who criticized not only the jihadi ideology, but also the traditional Wahhabi doctrine. Thomas Hegghammer (2010) argues that the modernists' "ideas made big waves in the Islamist community because they touched upon important taboos, and because the people articulating them were not Westernised liberals, but religious students like the radicals themselves" (p. 92). The transformation within the Saudi religious community was an essential factor in the ideological recession of the violent extremism during this period. However, the fact that this transformation was spontaneous rather than organized by institutions made it falls short of being conclusive. In the absence of institutions that could sponsor and broaden this ideological transformation, remnants of the Saudi jihad veterans, who did not integrate well into the community, remained susceptible to recruitment by international extremist organizations.

### **Al-Qaeda**

Osama Bin Ladin, the leader of Al-Qaeda, rebelled against Saudi Arabia and the international coalition in 1991; however, a coherent organization did not emerge before 1996. As a number of experts note, "Al Qaeda's structure only cohered after Bin Laden's return to Afghanistan in 1996, following his deportation from Sudan" (Rabasa, et al., 2006, p. 28). This, in part, was due to the chaotic state of the jihad community in the 1990s. In order to overcome this problem, Bin Ladin allied himself with the well-established Egyptian Jihad Group in Afghanistan. For all their differences, Bin Ladin and his Egyptian deputy, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, shared vehement opposition to the Saudi and Egyptian governments. However, they learned from the failure of local revolutionaries in Algeria, Sudan, and other parts of the Islamic world. With the successful experience of the global jihad in Afghani in mind, Bin Ladin and his deputy tried to bridge the gap between global success and local failure. In Bin Ladin's view, "other



extremists, who aimed at local rulers or Israel, did not go far enough. They had not taken on what he called ‘the head of the snake’” (The 9/11 Commission, 2004, p. 54).

Bin Ladin singled out the U.S. as the enemy of the *ummah* (the Islamic nation) not because of a sudden “clash of civilizations,” but rather because the U.S. fit his contemporary jihad model. Al-Qaeda’s project was to unite extremist groups, which were divided by local politics, under one umbrella and against a common enemy. In replacing the Soviet Union with the U.S., Bin Ladin believed he could mobilize a global movement similar to the Afghan jihad (Alsubaie, 2007). In order to invoke the mujahedeen’s memory and frame his struggle as a jihad, Bin Ladin declared war on the U.S. and its allies from the Hindu Kush Mountains, the battlefield of the Afghan jihad. In his declaration he stated that:

A safe base is now available in the high Hindukush mountains in Khurasan [sic]; where—by the Grace of Allah—the largest infidel military force of the world was destroyed. And the myth of the super power was withered ... Today we work from the same mountains to lift the iniquity that had been imposed on the Ummah by the Zionist-Crusader alliance (Bin Laden's Fatwa, 1996).

Although Al-Qaeda was not able to mobilize a global contemporary jihad at the scale of the Afghan jihad, it succeeded in building a transnational terrorist organization. In addition to the support of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, there were a number of factors that facilitated Al-Qaeda’s evolution. First, the rise of Al-Qaeda in the mid-1990s coincided with the rise of low-intensity conflicts that followed the collapse of the Cold War order. Civil wars in Algeria, Somalia, Bosnia, Tajikistan, and Chechnya were fought by politico-religious parties, which farmed their power struggle as jihad (Hegghammer, Jihad in Saudi Arabia, 2010). Bin Ladin and his deputy, Al-Zawahiri, tailored their slogans to fit their transnational audience in order to draw

recruits from all these conflicts. In their declaration of war in 1996, they issued a fatwa stating that:

It should not be hidden from you that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslims blood became the cheapest and their wealth as loot in the hands of the enemies. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajakestan [sic], Burma, Cashmere, Assam, Philippine, Fatani, Ogadin, Somalia, Erithria [sic], Chechnia [sic] and in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience (Bin Laden's Fatwa, 1996).

Bin Ladin and Al-Zawahiri used their contacts with jihad veterans fighting these conflicts and tried to support them financially. While some groups adopted Al-Qaeda's brand name for financial support, others were bogged down by their domestic politics. Nevertheless, Bin Ladin continued to capitalize on these conflicts and atrocities to justify Al-Qaeda's violence, which was sanctioned by his own fatwas. In 1998, he declared another fatwa stating that "the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it" (Al Qaeda's Fatwa, 1998).

The second factor that gave Al-Qaeda an edge over not only the old well-established extremist organizations but also the states in the region was the revolution of information in the late 1990s. The introduction of the internet and satellite news networks had a profound impact on propagating Al-Qaeda's message and exaggerating its image. In the late 1990s, people all over the Islamic world, for the first time in history, gained access to information that was not censored

by their governments. Although some states tried to control the flow of information, Al-Qaeda had utilized the internet more than any state in the region. Studies on terrorism on the internet indicate that Al-Qaeda has utilized more than 4000 websites for propaganda, recruitment, training, and fundraising (Al-Tayar, 2010).

In an attempt to match this global propaganda with deeds, Al-Qaeda engaged in a global terrorist campaign. As Gordon McCormick and Frank Giordano (2007) suggested,

Violence, in this case, is used as an instrument of armed propaganda. The objective is to advertise the existence of an emerging opposition, raise popular consciousness and define the terms of the struggle...Violence is also used to provoke the state into engaging in excessive counter-measures in an effort to improve the relative image of the insurgency (p. 307-308).

In their writings, Al-Qaeda's theorists were explicit in stating the need for raising popular consciousness and provoking the U.S. In his work *Idarat Altawahhush* (the Management of Savagery), Al-Qaeda's strategist Abu Bakr Naji (2004) attributed the failure of the contemporary jihad movement to the Muslim public's unawareness of their power and the importance of their struggle. According to Naji, the public consciousness had been obscured by the U.S. materialistic media influence. As a result of this ignorance, Naji explains, Al-Qaeda concluded that it must launch sophisticated provocative operations against the U.S. to achieve:

First objective: Destroying an important part of the U.S. prestige and infusing confidence into the hearts of the masses through:

1. Exposing the American media's aura that portrays America as an invincible power.

2. Making America replace its proxy war against Islam with a direct war to expose itself before the eyes of the masses...

Second objective: Compensating the jihad movement for casualties sustained during the last thirty years through expected global mobilization, which will be possible for two reasons:

1. The fascination with the operations that will be launched against America.
2. The rage over the American blatant and direct interference into the Islamic world...which can be channeled to be an inexhaustible source of mobilization for the jihad movement. (p. 9-10)

Like Naji, a number of Al-Qaeda's strategists explicitly envisioned this provoking strategy. Ayman Al-zawahirri (2001) laid out this strategy in his book, *Fursan Taht Rayat Alnabi* (Knights Under the Prophet's Banner). Another important figure who confirmed this strategy was Sayyid Imam Alsharif (aka Dr. Fadl), a former Al-Qaeda's top theorist, who recanted his radical views and denounced violence. According to Dr. Fadl, for a small group like Al-Qaeda, attacking the U.S. was the shortest road to fame (Abushamah, 2010).

Five months after its declaration of war in 1998, Al-Qaeda launched its first spectacular terrorist attack against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salam, Tanzania, killing over 224 people and injuring more than 500 others. This attack was followed by another attack against the U.S. Navy destroyer, USS Cole, in Yemen in 2000, which killed 17 servicemen and injured 40 others (The 9/11Commission, 2004). With the exception of two tomahawk missiles against Bin Ladin's facilities in Sudan and Afghanistan, which failed to kill Bin Ladin, Al-Qaeda's attacks did not generate a serious U.S. response. The fact that these attacks did not

provoke an excessive U.S. response, as Bin Ladin expected, gave him more time and determination to commit a more provocative attack.

### **The 9/11 Attack in Context**

By 2001, the politico-religious revolutionary tides that had surged in the 1990s had reached their lowest ebb. Conflicts framed as jihad in Tajikistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya ended without what the politico-religious parties fought for: a Taliban-like Islamic state. Terrorist cells in Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have been dismantled. Previous Al-Qaeda's attacks against the U.S. did not generate their intended mobilization effects. More importantly, the pro-American attitude was quite high in the region. In addition to freeing Kuwait with minimum civilian casualties, the U.S. lowered their profile in the Gulf, withdrew from Somalia, and intervened to end the massacres of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo in the late 1990s (Kayaoğlu, 2012). In the Gulf States, religious communities broke ties with all the politico-religious organizations that took part in the international opposition to the Gulf War. Even the Sahwah sheikhs in Saudi Arabia, who did not support the international coalitions, vehemently opposed the concept of Bin Ladin's contemporary jihad.

All these dynamics worked against Al-Qaeda's model and posed a significant challenge to its global mobilization campaign. In order for Al-Qaeda's model to work, peoples of the region needed to view the U.S. as not only the patron of their local oppressors, but also an aggressive empire. As Thomas Hegghammer (2010) explains it, having the U.S. as a common enemy was a necessary discursive frame for Al-Qaeda's mobilization process. Therefore, provoking the U.S. into an aggressive act against the region was a strategic necessity for Al-Qaeda in order to overcome its mobilization dilemma.

In addition to the main strategic objective of the 9/11 attacks, Al-Qaeda aimed to achieve two other objectives. The first was to undermine the relationships between the U.S. and Arab governments, Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular. According to Ramzi Binalshibh, one of the facilitators of the 9/11 attacks, by recruiting fifteen Saudis to attack the U.S., Bin Ladin “wanted to send a message to the government of Saudi Arabia about its relationship with the United States” (The 9/11Commission, 2004, p. 232). The second objective was to remind people in these countries that their sons were still fighting the “occupier of their holy land.” The absence of Saudi nationals in Al-Qaeda’s previous attacks did not play well into Bin Ladin’s narrative. Therefore, a high-profile Saudi participation in 9/11 was critical to Bin Ladin’s strategy.

Another explanation, however, was offered by the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who argues that the process of selecting operatives was subject to practical operational considerations (The 9/11Commission, 2004). Martha Crenshaw, a terrorism expert, supports this explanation, arguing that “from a practical standpoint, it was easier for Saudi citizens to get American visas than it was for other nationalities from which hijackers might have been recruited” (2007, p. 17).

In general, Al-Qaeda’s leaders knew that they could not destroy U.S. power or end its influence with such attacks. However, they all agreed that the failing contemporary jihad movement needed a shock to awaken the masses from their disregard. The 9/11 attacks were suicidal not only for the nineteen perpetrators, but also for their organization as the magnitude of the attacks would trigger more than what Al-Qaeda planned for.

## **The Immediate Impact of the 9/11 Attacks**

The 911 attacks, which claimed nearly 3000 lives and destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon, were far more tragic than even Bin Ladin expected. On a videotape released by the U.S. Department of Defense, Bin Ladin was recorded saying that,

We calculated that the floors that would be hit would be three or four floors...due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only (U.S. Releases Videotape of Osama Bin Laden, 2001).

The U.S. response also was different from its responses to previous Al-Qaeda's attacks. After the Taliban government refused to cooperate, the U.S. responded with a full-scale invasion of Afghanistan. The magnitude of the 9/11 attacks and the rising threat of terrorism triggered an unprecedented international cooperation to wage a global war on terrorism. Governments, non-government organizations, and peoples around the world condemned the attacks and declared their alliance with the U.S. In the Islamic world, people felt betrayed and alienated by Al-Qaeda, which had committed the most devastating terrorist attack in their names and the name of their religion.

In Saudi Arabia, in particular, the impact of 9/11 was more severe than in any other Islamic country. The attacks created a paradoxical dilemma in the Saudi-U.S. relationship. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is the closest U.S. ally in the Gulf region. The Saudi-US alliance during the Gulf War in 1990, which triggered the global extremist opposition, was an extension

of the two countries' longstanding relationship. On the other hand, according to the preliminary investigations into the 9/11 attacks, fifteen of the nineteen perpetrators were Saudi nationals. The Saudi government and ulama were quick to strongly condemn the attacks. On September 15, 2001, the Saudi Grand Mufti stated that "the recent developments in the United States constitute a form of injustice that is not tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts" (2003, p. 117). The Saudi conservative ulama dealt with the 9/11 events with the same conservatism they did with the attacks that took place in the Kingdom. As a result, they came under severe criticism for not reaching out to the global media with strong condemnation.

Remarkably, Sahwah sheikhs, who were more enthusiastic about the Afghan jihad and critical of the Saudi-U.S. alliance during the Gulf War, not only condemned the attacks, but also reached out and sought to reconcile with the American people. Sahwah sheikhs, among other Saudi intellectuals, engaged in an intellectual debate with American thinkers for mutual understanding. In a manifesto titled "*How We Can Coexist*," which was sent to their American peers, 153 Saudi signatories including sheikhs and professionals stated that:

We say clearly and in total frankness that we are prepared to discuss any issue raised by the West, realizing that there are a number of concepts, moral values, rights, and ideas that we share with the West and that can be nurtured to bring about what is best for all of us. This means that we have common objectives...It is completely unreasonable to turn the tragic events of September 11 into a means of categorizing our world's ideologies, civilizations, and societies. Those attacks were unwelcome to many people in the Muslim world due to the values and moral teachings of Islam that they violated (How We Can Coexist, 2002).



Given their position on the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, the Sahwah sheikhs' new position during the American campaign against the Taliban in 2001 was a turning point in the jihad ideology in Saudi Arabia. Their moderate position prompted a fierce debate within the global jihad community and gave rise to extremist young preachers in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. It should be noted that not all these extremist preachers supported Al-Qaeda's terrorism; however, they still viewed jihad as an anti-imperialism struggle and Afghanistan as a victim of both terrorism and imperialism.

Despite the tense political climate, Sahwah sheikhs and other Islamic thinkers, at least in Saudi Arabia, were able to show the difference between the Soviet and the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan. These efforts were facilitated by the threat of Al-Qaeda's terrorism, which targeted Muslims and non-Muslims alike. According to Abdul Aziz Alkhedr (2010), an expert on the Sahwah, the Sahwah sheikhs succeeded in isolating Al-Qaeda from the Saudi religious community during the two years after the 9/11 attacks. However, when the U.S. shifted its focus from the legitimate fight in Afghanistan and invaded Iraq, both the Saudi internal front and the U.S. global alliance against terrorism struggled to persist.

### **The War on Terror versus the War on Iraq**

The global reaction to the 9/11 attacks was unprecedented. Countries from all over the world pledged support to the U.S. in the war on terror. Within a month of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Kabul fell without much resistance. Al-Qaeda, which was portrayed as a terrorist superpower with armament and training camps, vanished. This quick collapse of Al-Qaeda and its host Taliban dealt a great blow to Al-Qaeda's mobilization campaign. Al-Qaeda's financial sources were tracked and shut down particularly in the Islamic world. In a desperate attempt to exploit the U.S. campaign, Bin Ladin stepped up his propaganda by sending videotapes and

manipulating violent images from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Bin Ladin's propaganda was aided by President George W. Bush's management of the war on terror.

Remarkably, both President Bush and Bin Ladin engaged in polarizing campaigns. While President Bush warned against a global violent extremism, Bin Ladin emphasized the imperial intent behind attacking not only Afghanistan, but the Islamic world in general. In his call for nations to join the global war on terror, President Bush declared that "every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Address to a Joint Session of Congress , 2001). A month later, Bin Ladin responded: "every Muslim after this event (should fight for their religion)...these events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of infidels" (Text of Bin Laden Video Statement, 2001).

Despite the high publicity surrounding his campaign, Bin Ladin was losing on all grounds during the two years after 9/11. First, on moral and religious grounds, people in the region distanced themselves from Al-Qaeda after committing the most devastating attacks in the history of terrorism. No legitimate ideology could justify killing more than 3000 innocent people. Second, Bin Ladin's organization, which he propagandized as formidable, vanished with the first bomb dropped on Afghanistan. On the ground, Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces were defeated in a relatively short time. The fall of the major Afghan cities within the first month of the war demystified the strength of the Al-Qaeda-Taliban alliance. Third and more importantly, Bin Ladin's model, which was based on moving the masses against an imperialist aggression, was negated by the magnitude of the 9/11 attacks. Nevertheless, President Bush's decision to invade Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, gave Bin Ladin's anti-imperialism argument more ammunition.

The war on Iraq rescued not only Al-Qaeda's hunted operatives, but also its global campaign in general. In addition to the ideological boost it gave Bin Ladin's propaganda, the Iraq war helped Al-Qaeda's campaign at the operational and strategic levels. The chaotic environment in Iraq became an ideal refuge for Al-Qaeda's remnants. Within the wider jihad community, Iraq became a hot spot for different types of mujahedeen who, despite opposing Al-Qaeda's terrorism, believed in jihad as an anti-imperialist struggle. Furthermore, the Iraq War prompted a recruitment drive of a new generation of mujahedeen and flooded the region with arms and explosive. This, in turn, led to an increase in the capabilities of extremist groups that affiliated themselves with Al-Qaeda after the war. Consequently, terrorism spiked not only in the region, but also regions as far as South Asia and Europe. Saudi Arabia, in particular, which shares long borders with Iraq, witnessed the most devastating terrorist wave in its history.

### **The Post-Iraq War Terrorism in Saudi Arabia**

Since 1996, Saudi Arabia had remained stable despite the increasing global threat of Al-Qaeda. This is due to a number of reasons. First, the terrorist attacks in Riyadh and Khobar in 1995 and 1996 prompted a fierce crackdown on all forms of violent extremism including hardliner preachers and sympathizers. Second, Bin Ladin established the core of his organization while he was in exile in Sudan. According to Al-Bahri, Bin Ladin's Yamani bodyguard, the core of Al-Qaeda in 1996 consisted of Egyptian and Algerian jihad veterans. Al-Bahri asserts that the first to join Bin Ladin by that time was a group of Yemenis, who grew to compose 95% of the central organization (Al-Hamadi, 2004). Al-Qaeda also had Saudi members by that time, most of whom had personal relations with Bin Ladin. However, their number and capabilities were not enough to establish a Saudi Al-Qaeda branch. Also contributing to Saudi Arabia's historic stability is the lack of a culture of organized activism among the Saudi jihad veterans. Most

Saudis, who go to the jihad fronts, are driven by individual missionary impulses rather than organizational bonds.

Al-Qaeda's slow recruitment in Saudi Arabia was a result of not only organizational factors but also an ideological complexity. The efforts of the Sahwah sheikhs, who recanted their radical views after their release in the late 1990s, created an ideological transformation within the Saudi religious community. Although this transformation gave rise to a small number of radical preachers who condemned the Sahwah's moderate stance, this extremist clique did not advocate violence until later in 2003. As a result, Bin Ladin had to depend on his closest Saudi and non-Saudi associates in Afghanistan to establish a franchise in Saudi Arabia.

In 2000, Bin Ladin sent his closest Saudi associate, Yusuf Al-Uyayri, to establish a number of terrorist sleeper cells, which would be the core of Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques. Al-Uyayri used his contacts to link with some Saudi jihad veterans who fought with him in Afghanistan. He first established a seven-member cell, whose mission was relation management with other jihad veterans based on family ties and friendship. For Al-Uyayri, trust and loyalty were the most important membership requirements. Al-Uyayri linked with his veteran comrades Abdul Aziz Al-Muqrin (Saudi), Khalid Al-Hajj (Yamani), Yunus Al-Hayari (Moroccan), Turki Al-Dandani (Saudi), and Kareem A-Mujatti (Moroccan). Each one of these individuals established his own cell in coordination with Al-Uyayri. Other cells would be established, trained, and sent to the Kingdom from Al-Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan (Huzaam, 2005; Al-Ghonaim, 2012). In the early stages, each terrorist cell would consist of 7 to 10 members. However, late in 2003, some cells reached 85 members such as the case of Al-Dandani's cell.

In contrast to the economic-grievance argument, which holds that terrorists come from impoverished regions, most of Al-Qaeda's recruits came from the most privileged central and western Saudi regions (Al-Tayar, 2010). Another distinctive character of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia is the transnational identity of its members. Although most of them Saudis, Al-Qaeda's members who committed terrorist acts in Saudi Arabia in this period came from countries ranging from Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Syria, and Iraq to Egypt, Morocco, Chad, Nigeria, and Mauritania (Fighting Terrorism, 2007). These characteristics resulted from two main factors. First, Al-Qaeda's recruitment primarily targeted the jihad veteran community, who came from the Saudi central and western regions where the recruitment of the Afghan jihad took place in the 1980s. Recruitment in this community, especially during the first phases, relied on friendship and family ties more than ideological and grievance-based factors.

Second, Al-Qaeda's leadership employed foreign terrorists to frame its campaign as a global Islamic struggle rather than a local opposition. Other operations that followed Al-Qaeda's declaration of war in 1998 bore this character, including the 911 attacks. In fact, even the new Saudi recruits came in under the banner of expelling the foreign forces from the Land of the Two Holy Mosques. According to the testimonies of a number of Al-Qaeda's members who have been captured and tried in Saudi Arabia, they signed up for an anti-imperialist jihad, not for a local terrorist campaign (Al-Ghonaim, 2011). Although some Al-Qaeda's members believed in fighting the U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia as an anti-imperialist jihad, the U.S. invasion of Iraq increased the anti-imperialist sentiment.

During the rise of anti-imperialism sentiments in 2003, Al-Qaeda launched its terrorist campaign with 9/11-like triple terrorist attacks in Riyadh. On May 12, 2003, a triple car bombing rocked three different residential compounds housing Western defense contractors. The

simultaneous attacks left 23 people dead and more than 194 injured. Among the dead were seven Saudis, seven Americans, and nine others of different nationalities (Fighting Terrorism, 2007). It was not clear how many terrorists were involved in the attacks; however, investigations revealed that twelve suicide terrorists were killed during the attack (The First Bombings, 2008).

Before the triple attacks, the Saudi counterterrorism campaign was already underway. Within two weeks, the Saudi security forces were able to kill the founder of Al-Qaeda in the Kingdom, Yusuf Al-Uyayri, and captured a number of terrorists who had a direct connection to the attacks. This operation was one of a series of nationwide coordinated operations that resulted in killing more than twenty terrorists and capturing more than 150 others within the first five months. In response, a terrorist cell attacked another residential compound on November 8, 2003 killing 17 people and injuring 122 others (Counterterrorism Facts and Numbers, 2011).

Despite the fact that the devastating attacks in 2003 alienated the Saudi people against Al-Qaeda, the recruitment in the Kingdom was remarkably high. Counterterrorism reports about captured terrorist cells show that the number of members expanded from seven in the beginning of the campaign to more than eighty-five members in late 2003 (Fighting Terrorism, 2007). This was due to intertwining operational and ideological factors. During the first year of its terrorist campaign in the Kingdom, Al-Qaeda focused its propaganda on anti-imperialist themes to benefit from the public uproar against the Iraq War. According to the testimony of a twenty-one-year-old Saudi member, Al-Qaeda's recruiters convinced him and his friends that the Americans would militarily occupy Saudi Arabia after Iraq. Therefore, he explained, they joined to fight them in Iraq. Another member confessed during his trial that he went to Iraq after he received a fatwa from one of Al-Qaeda's self-claimed sheikhs saying that neglecting jihad in Iraq is a great sin (Al-Zaidan, 2005). While Al-Qaeda's ideologues preached the anti-imperialist message

among the young foot soldiers, its lieutenants dedicated their efforts and money to training and smuggling fighters. The trial of the terrorist cell 41 revealed that the cell was responsible for paying Syrians to smuggle fighters and weapons into and out of Iraq (Al-Ghonaim, 2011; 2012). During the first year of the war, Al-Qaeda used the Iraq war for its ideological as well as operational advantages. While the war served an anti-imperialist ideological cause, Iraq became a magnet and training ground for militants.

In Saudi Arabia, although the official religious establishment and the Sahwah leaders came together to warn Saudi youth against getting caught in the Iraq war, Al-Qaeda was successful in recruiting its own muftis. Four Saudi young clerics, dubbed in Saudi Arabia the “sheikhs of darkness,” joined Al-Qaeda and served as its underground theologians. When the Saudi authorities launched an operation to control its borders with Iraq, the ideologues of Al-Qaeda used this security measure as a rallying propaganda point. Al-Qaeda’s underground muftis issued fatwas excommunicating the government of Saudi Arabia and its security forces based on what they interpreted as action against the holy jihad. The concept of excommunication is a contemporary one, alien to jihad ideology, particularly the Saudi traditional doctrine. Therefore, the excommunication fatwas marked an ideological shift within the Saudi jihad community, which had been driven by anti-imperialism sentiment. This ideological shift, in turn, paved the way for new types of terrorist attacks against Saudi government officials and facilities.

On April 21, 2004, a suicide terrorist detonated his car in front of the Saudi traffic police building leaving four people dead and injuring more than 148 others. Among the victims were two security officers, a reporter, and an 11-year-old girl (Al-Ghonaim, Al-Zaidan, & Al-Zahem, 2004). The attack was a turning point in Al-Qaeda’s terrorist campaign in the Kingdom. What was declared as an anti-imperialism campaign became an open terrorist campaign against not

only the Saudi allies, but also the Saudi people, government, and security forces. However, the lethal ideology that combined excommunication with contemporary jihad came at an organizational weak-point in Al-Qaeda's campaign. While its ideology became more extreme, by 2004, Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia suffered from the loss of the well-trained lieutenants who led the organization, planned its operations, and trained its operatives. Within the first year of its counterterrorism campaign, the Saudi security forces had been able to kill every individual who assumed the leadership of the organization starting with its founder, Al-Uyayri (Fighting Terrorism, 2007). In addition, the first line of the well-trained militants was either captured or killed during confrontations and suicidal attacks. In late 2004, the poorly organized attacks, which mostly consisted of one or two suicide bombers, were clear indications of the challenges Al-Qaeda was facing inside the Kingdom. One of Al-Qaeda's attempts to overcome these organizational challenges was to build virtual training camps online, which did not require an Al-Qaeda membership. On *Albattar*, a famous virtual training camp named after the first training camp established in the Kingdom, manuals would walk immature militants through making and detonating bombs. However, *Albattar* and its operator were eventually taken down by the Saudi authorities late in 2004 (Huzzam, 2005; 2006).

In addition to targeting government officials and facilities, Al-Qaeda desperately tried to expand its operations to attack Western consulates and oil facilities. However, most of these operations were foiled or failed. After a five-year fierce crackdown, Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia had to relocate to Yemen, where it merged with the Yemeni branch under the name of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. From Yemen, Al-Qaeda engaged in an assassination campaign against Saudi officials. Most notable was the late attempt to assassinate Prince Mohammed Bin Naif, Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs, who runs the Saudi counterterrorism program.



During Ramadan (August), 2009, Abdullah Assiri, a 24-year-old wanted terrorist who insisted on turning himself directly to the prince, detonated an explosive capsule embedded in his body killing himself and slightly injuring the prince (Al-Araifej, 2009). During its terrorist campaign, Al-Qaeda had assassinated Saudi security officers and Western contractors. However, this was the first assassination attempt against a member of the royal family. Furthermore, the nature of the attack marked a shift in Al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks. Instead of car bombings that were supported by large groups of gunmen, Al-Qaeda in Yemen invested more in undetected explosive materials deliverable by one individual. The assassination attempt in 2009 was the last major terrorist attack in the Kingdom; however, the Saudi counterterrorism campaign is still active today.

### **The Impact of the Iraq War on Violent Extremism**

According to the chronology of the terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia, the Iraq War was not the underlying cause of this terrorist wave. However, by playing into the narrative of Al-Qaeda, the war played a major role in remobilizing its campaign after the setback in Afghanistan. In the words of Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's second-in-command in 2003: "We thank God for appeasing us with the dilemma in Iraq after Afghanistan" (Scheuer, 2004, p. xxi). As shown in this chapter, the war on Iraq served Al-Qaeda at both the organizational and ideological levels. The chaotic environment in Iraq enabled Al-Qaeda to fill its ranks with well-trained operatives and open new training camps. More importantly, it ended Al-Qaeda's isolation that started with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Under the banner of jihad in Iraq, Al-Qaeda was able to reconnect with other extremist groups.

At the ideological level, the Iraq War reactivated Al-Qaeda's anti-imperialism foundation, its mobilization basis since its declaration of war in 1998. After the failure of the

model within the justified U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the war on Iraq was a prophecy come true for Al-Qaeda. The U.S. invasion of Iraq gave Bin Ladin some credibility at least within the jihad community. In his declaration of war in 1998, Bin Ladin justified his contemporary jihad with what he referred to as the U.S. occupation of the Arabian Peninsula and military actions against the Iraqi people:

If some people have in the past argued about the fact of the occupation, all the people of the Peninsula have now acknowledged it. The best proof of this is the Americans' continuing aggression against the Iraqi people using the Peninsula as a staging post (Al Qaeda's Fatwa, 1998).

A number of experts on terrorism point to the Iraq War as the catalyst of Al-Qaeda's ideological revival. Bruce Hoffman (2007) argues that the U.S. occupation of Iraq presented Al-Qaeda with the opportunity to put its concept into practice. In the case of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia in particular, the testimonies of captured terrorists, who recruited and smuggled fighters into and from Iraq, pointed to the strong link between the war on Iraq and their terrorist campaign in the Kingdom. These findings support the study's core hypothesis concerning the major impact of the Iraq War on mobilization for this wave of terrorism. Additional variables associated with the general impact of the Iraq War also influenced Al-Qaeda's mobilization in the war's aftermath.

### ***The Change in Public Perception***

Al-Qaeda began its war against the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1990, during the highest pro-American sentiment in the Gulf region. Experts who studied Al-Qaeda's recruitment pre-9/11 found that in the late 1990s, Bin Ladin was "desperate to recruit Saudis into his organization" (Hegghammer, 2010, p. 117). This finding is in line with the

testimony of Al-Bahri, a bodyguard and close associate of Bin Ladin, who stated that Al-Qaeda in 1996 consisted of mostly Egyptian, Algerian, and Yemeni jihad veterans (Al-Hamadi, 2004). The sheer magnitude of the 9/11 attacks further complicated Al-Qaeda's mobilization dilemma in the Gulf region. People across the region and in Saudi Arabia in particular felt that Al-Qaeda, after attacking them in the 1990s, betrayed them by committing terrorism in their name. Even extremist groups distanced themselves from Al-Qaeda in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. However, when President George W. Bush decided to invade Iraq, this public attitude started to change.

The war on Iraq frayed not only the war-on-terror international alliance but also the public sympathy for the war on terror. First, the alleged connection between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda did not resonate among the public. People knew very well that Saddam was the most secular ruler in the region and Al-Qaeda emerged as an opposition of his aggression in the first place. Second, the phantom weapons of mass destruction further complicated the situation. Third and more importantly, waging the Iraq war within the frame of the war on terrorism proved damaging to the war on terrorism. It is hard to sell a shock-and-awe campaign as a part of a war on terror. In an international poll conducted by Gallup International, which measured the support or opposition to the war on Iraq in 2003, people in 34 out of the 38 polled countries opposed the war. Another poll, the Pew Global Attitudes, which surveyed eight countries within the Islamic world in 2003, showed six of the eight countries opposed the U.S.-led effort to fight terrorism (Kull, 2003).

This change in public perception did not immediately translate into support for Al-Qaeda. However, it expanded Al-Qaeda's recruitment pool. The opposition of the U.S. occupation of Iraq was one of the very few subjects that jihad veterans, nationalists, and religious

revolutionaries agreed on. A large number of foreign fighters who went to fight in Iraq did not go there to join Al-Qaeda, but rather to fight the occupation. However, being the dominant opposition group in Iraq, Al-Qaeda eventually succeeded in attracting most of the foreign fighters. According to the testimonies of Saudis who went to fight in Iraq there are two types of Saudi fighters in Iraq. The first type consists of the fighters who, according to their testimonies, were appalled by the war's atrocities and went on a mission to help the Iraqi people. This type had nothing to do with Al-Qaeda; however, when in Iraq, they had only two choices: be either protected by Al-Qaeda or captured by the U.S. forces (Saudi Youth in Iraq, 2008). The second type of fighters went to Iraq armed by fatwas issued by Al-Qaeda's underground muftis (Al-Harbi, 2007). The same ideological motivations applied to other fighters from other countries as well. Despite their different individual calculations most of these fighters came back to the Kingdom as members of Al-Qaeda with one violent extremist agenda. This evidence supports hypothesis 3 (**H3**), which holds that *the higher the level of the change in popular perception of insecurity, the more susceptible the public becomes to extremist mobilization.*

### ***The Role of Extremist Political Entrepreneurs***

That many of Al-Qaeda's leaders and entrepreneurs including Al-Zawahiri thanked God for the blessing of the Iraq war is clear evidence that the war served their propaganda (Scheuer, 2004). However, the ideological impact of the Iraq war was deeper than propagandist clichés. After the 9/11 attacks alienated people from Al-Qaeda, preachers and sheikhs around the Islamic world engaged in a debate to redefine jihad and distinguish it from Al-Qaeda's terrorism. As shown in this chapter, this debate expanded to include some American thinkers. In Saudi Arabia, in particular, Sahwah hardliner sheikhs, who advocated the Afghani jihad in the 1980s, strongly condemned Al-Qaeda and Taliban in the midst of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001

(Alkhedr, 2010). However, when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, the invasion frustrated the debate and put the moderate sheikhs and thinkers in an awkward position. As a result, a number of marginalized preachers seized the moment of fame and tried to play the hawkish role by calling for jihad in Iraq (Al-Harbi, 2007; Al-Ghonaim, 2012). Al-Qaeda's entrepreneurs exploited this ideological chaos to recruit not only young fighters but also young hawkish preachers. The testimonies of a number of Saudis coming from Iraq indicated that they went to Iraq based on fatwas issued by these preachers (Al-Harbi, 2007; Saudi Youth in Iraq, 2008).

In one of the terrorist trials in Saudi Arabia, a group of terrorist suspects who joined Al-Qaeda in Iraq demanded the trial and punishment of preachers, who, in their views, exploited their zeal and pushed them into troubled zones (Al-Ghonaim, 2011). Eventually, the Saudi authorities arrested Al-Qaeda's muftis and put them on trial. However, this was after thousands of fighters went to Iraq and joined Al-Qaeda. The war on Iraq not only facilitated the role of extremist entrepreneurs, but also boosted them with more extremists. This, in turn, enabled Al-Qaeda to reframe its campaign around the Iraq cause. The testimonies of a large number of fighters who went to Iraq based on this ideological campaign support hypothesis 4 (**H4**), which concerns the role of extremist entrepreneurs as interpreters of the war in Iraq.

### ***The State's Response***

In contrast to the waves of terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s, this wave of terrorism prompted the most comprehensive counterterrorism campaign in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi counterterrorism efforts were triggered by an unintended explosion inside a house in a quiet neighborhood in Riyadh on March 15, 2003. The house turned out to be a bomb factory for a terrorist cell preparing for a terrorist attack. The explosion killed the bomb maker and revealed a trove of documents and large quantities of weapons and explosives (Fighting Terrorism, 2007).

Based on documents found at the scene, the security forces engaged in a manhunt for terrorist suspects. However, in the aftermath of the first attack on May 12, 2003, Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz (the current king) vowed to dedicate all means to fighting terrorism. On May 13, the Crown Prince declared:

I vow to my fellow citizens, and to the friends who reside among us, that the State will be vigilant about their security and well-being. Our nation is capable, by the Grace of God Almighty and the unity of its citizens, to confront and destroy the threat posed by a deviant few and those who endorse or support them. With the help of God Almighty, we shall prevail (Counterterrorism, 2003).

Since May 2003, the Saudi authorities have embarked on a comprehensive counterterrorist campaign, which consists of hard and soft components.<sup>23</sup> In this strategy, Saudi authorities draw on two main lessons from their past experience with violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The first is the importance of using the proper and minimum force and the second is the realization that security measures alone cannot end violent extremism. Along with the fierce crackdown, the Saudi government also offers amnesties to encourage terrorists to turn themselves in to the authorities and avoid the hard component of the campaign (Fighting Terrorism, 2007; Hegghammer, 2010; Boucek, 2008).

### ***The Hard Component***

The hard component of the Saudi counterterrorism strategy is based on the Saudi view of terrorism. Despite the transnational nature of terrorism in the Kingdom, Saudi authorities view it as a criminal rather than an act of war. Therefore, Saudi armed forces are not engaged in

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<sup>23</sup> Information about the Saudi counterterrorism strategy is based on the author's interviews with Dr Abdulrahman Al-Hadlaq, advisor to the Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs between 2010 and 2011.

combating terrorism. During the counterterrorism campaign, the role of the armed forces has been in a support capacity. Although counterterrorism has been a priority at all levels of the Saudi government, the actual fight has been the responsibility of the security forces of the Interior Ministry.

Within the hard component of the strategy, the Interior Ministry increased the readiness of its forces to combat terrorism through intensive training and accrual of advanced counterterrorism technologies. It also enhanced the effectiveness of its human intelligence in order to conduct accurate low-profile raids with minimum collateral damage given the fact that terrorists use safe houses in busy residential areas. As a result of these surgical raids, the security forces have been able to eliminate all six individuals who assumed the leadership of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia before it relocated to Yemen. Furthermore, the security forces dismantled Al-Qaeda's terrorist cells, defused hundreds of terrorist plots, captured more than 2000 terrorists, and seized large caches of weapons and explosives. All the detained terrorism suspects have been put on public trial in a civil court, including the sheikhs who advocated violence. While a number of them received prison sentences between 5 to 30 years, others were not convicted and were released after going through a rehabilitation program. However, most of the trials are still proceeding (Al-Ghonaim & Al-Naser, 2008; Al-Shihri, 2011).

### ***The Soft Component***

The soft component of the Saudi counterterrorism strategy targets two main aspects of terrorism: financing and ideology. On the financing front, the Saudi authorities in cooperation with the international community took steps to freeze the assets of suspected organizations and block their accounts. Furthermore, the Saudi authorities regulated the charitable organizations and financial institutions in the Kingdom. In 2003, the Saudi Monetary Agency implemented

new regulations, “Rules Governing Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing,” in order to tighten the regulations of financial and charitable institutions (Initiatives and Actions Taken by the KSA in the War on Terror, 2003).

On the ideological front, the Saudi government launched a comprehensive counter-ideological campaign that employs educational institutions (schools and mosques), information (media and internet), and a rehabilitation program for terrorist detainees. This campaign stems from the recognition that a deceptive ideology occupies a central role in the struggle against Al-Qaeda. Therefore, reeducation is the centerpiece of the Saudi counter-ideology campaign. This campaign includes three main programs: prevention, rehabilitation, and after-release care.

### **Prevention Program**

In the nation-wide prevention program, governmental ministries and non-governmental institutions cooperate to promote the true Islamic principles and discredit the violent extremism. The first step in this endeavor was to initiate a campaign to reform school textbooks and train educators. Subjects such as national identity and counterterrorism were introduced in the new curricula. Within this reeducation campaign, the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs launched a religious training program for more than 40,000 mosque imams (Al-Shemary, 2008). With this program, the authorities aim to institutionalize preaching and connect the young imams and religious students with the credited religious scholars.

The education program extends to the public sphere to raise awareness about the threat of violent extremism through lectures, online counterterrorism campaigns, and TV shows. Former extremists have appeared on prime time to talk about their experience and renounce violence. In



one of the interviews aired on Saudi TV, the jailed sheikhs who issued fatwas supporting Al-Qaeda repented their radical ideology and recanted their calls for violence.

### **Rehabilitation Program**

The innovative rehabilitation program proceeds from the assumption that violent extremists have been misled and deviated from the true Islamic path. The program aims to demobilize violent extremists through intellectual, religious, and psychological counseling. All the terrorist suspects in custody are encouraged to enroll in this voluntary program; however, passing the program does not change the detainees' legal sentences. The program is run by an advisory committee that consists of three sub-committees. The first is the religious sub-committee, which conducts religious study sessions and invites senior ulama to engage in debates with the detainees. The second is the psychological and social sub-committee, which consists of psychologists, social scientists, and volunteered family members. This committee evaluates the detainee's psychological and social condition and determines the proper financial support each detainee and his family need. The committee remains in contact with the detainee's family even after his release. The third sub-committee is the security committee, which tracks security records and works with the other committees to provide detainees with recommendations for their post-release safety.

Detainees who complete their sentences and pass the first phase of the rehabilitation program go to the halfway house, another rehabilitation facility outside the prison. This home-style facility includes a library as well as outdoor recreation courts. During this phase, detainees continue to enroll in classes, activities, and training to develop their social skills.

### **After-Release Care Program**

The after-release care program supports released detainees as they reintegrate into their society. It assists with continued counseling, education, financial support, and job research. In addition to the monthly stipends, the committee provides financial assistance based on the detainee's financial and social status. For instance, it pays for the wedding expenses of some released suspects. In some cases, released suspects' wedding parties are attended by high-ranking officials, including the man in charge of counterterrorism, Prince Mohammed Bin Naif, Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs.

The overall objective of the soft approach is to counter extremist ideology within the religious community as well as the wider Saudi society. The broad awareness program has been very effective in not only curbing violent extremism but also changing the mindset of the Saudi society toward other issues such as tolerance and dialogue among different sects within the society. It is still too early to evaluate the rehabilitation program for terrorist suspects, but since 2003, only 35 out of the 3000 participants have been rearrested (Boucek, 2008).

### ***The International Military Intervention***

Al-Qaeda declared its war against the U.S. and its allies under the banner of "expelling the occupiers from the Arabian Peninsula." However, the fact that the goal of the U.S. forces in the region was to free the occupied Kuwait made it harder for Al-Qaeda to mobilize the masses against the U.S. throughout the 1990s. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 in the midst of a tense political atmosphere, it created a crisis situation for the moderates in the region and presented Al-Qaeda with a solution to its mobilization dilemma. For the wider jihad community, Al-Qaeda's primary recruitment target, the U.S. occupation was a classical jihad case for which little interpretation was needed. While Al-Qaeda was crippled in Afghanistan, fighters from all

over the Islamic world poured into Iraq to swell Al-Qaeda's ranks. Testimonies of young Saudis who went to Iraq for jihad point to the presence of fighters from places as far as Morocco and Austria (Al-Harbi, 2007; Saudi Youth in Iraq, 2008). During a trial of a group of Al-Qaeda's operatives in Saudi Arabia, the court attorney stated that the group consisted of Saudis, Egyptians, Syrians, Yemenis, Chadians, Nigerians, and Sudanese, most of whom were recruited in Iraq (Al-Ghonaim, 2012). Despite the fact that Al-Qaeda was under the U.S. bombardment in Afghanistan, its recruitment rate increased as a result of the rising opposition to the U.S. military actions in Iraq. The mobilization of a large number of fighters, especially during this difficult time, supports hypothesis 5 (**H5**), which holds that *international military intervention increases transnational mobilization for violence*.

## Conclusion

Al-Qaeda emerged as opposition to what Bin Ladin refers to as the U.S. occupation of the Arabian Peninsula. Since the Gulf War in 1990, Bin Ladin and his ideologues have been trying to portray the U.S. as an evil empire bent to destroy and occupy Muslim lands. In his declaration of war in 1998, Bin Ladin declared: "here they come to annihilate what is left of this people and to humiliate their Muslim neighbors...The best proof of this is their eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavor to fragment all the states of the region" (Al Qaeda's Fatwa, 1998). During his terrorist campaign, Bin Ladin failed to change the public's favorable perception of U.S. efforts to free Kuwait. However, the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003 not only played into Bin Ladin's narrative but also confirmed his prophecy. In addition to the ideological revival it provided Al-Qaeda, the war offered a new sanctuary in Iraq for militants under the U.S. bombardment in Afghanistan. In Iraq, Al-Qaeda was able to assume the

leadership of the occupation opposition, recruit a new generation of militants, and build training camps to replace the ones it lost in Afghanistan.

In general, the U.S. shift of the war on terrorism from Afghanistan to Iraq ended an unprecedented international coalition against terrorism, which may never again be possible. In the years after the Iraq war, terrorism has increased in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. In addition to Al-Qaeda and its franchises all over the region, Iraqi militant Shiites established their own militant armies. Furthermore, the U.S. occupation of Iraq increased the anti-American sentiment in the region and cast into doubt any internationally credible effort to fight terrorism in the future.

## **Chapter 7 - Conclusion**

This study examined the impact of three key regional political developments on the evolution of transnational terrorism. All three cases—the Iranian revolution, the 1990 Gulf war, and the 2003 Iraq war—support the core research hypothesis that regional political developments have a significant and underappreciated impact on extremist mobilization for violence. In particular, the crisis situations that such developments create—rather than their immediate catalyst effects—unleash a number of dynamics whose interaction facilitates extremist mobilization. The crisis situations generate paradigm shifts in public perception of insecurity, present opportunities for revolutionary entrepreneurs to put their ideology into practice, and provoke state responses that are hasty and excessive.

The study attempted to put the three waves of terrorism that followed these developments in their historical, ideological, and political contexts. Despite the wide difference among the cases studied, two intertwined threads run through all of them. The first is the development of a politico-religious ideology that, although differing from one terrorist group to another, became a driving force behind most of the terrorism in the cases. As shown in this study, this ideology is not a product of extreme religiosity but rather a fluid and contemporary radical worldview that changed over time based on the political context. The second thread running through all three cases is the presence of political crises that shaped and revolutionized this radical worldview. The three destabilizing political developments studied in this research mark three thresholds through which this extremist worldview transformed from passive to violent and then to organized terrorism.

In the Islamic world, where there are no boundaries between religion, politics, and social traditions, one cannot analyze the evolution of the ideology of violent extremism in isolation of

its social and political contexts. Yet, the impact of political contexts on violent extremism is not exclusive to the Islamic world. A number of experts on international terrorism point to the fact that the ideologies of terrorism have evolved throughout history from the extremist right to the far left and to the extremist right once again based on the political contexts of different historical periods (Crenshaw, 2000; Hoffman, 2006). Bruce Hoffman (2006) argues that political developments during the eighteenth century followed by the emergence of new concepts and radical political schools of thought such as Marxism and anarchism transferred terrorism “from mostly religious to a predominantly secular phenomenon” (p. 84). Hoffman (2006) attributes the initial “reemergence of modern religious terrorism” to the Islamic revolution in Iran; however, he adds that in the 1990s the wave of modern religious terrorism “expanded to embrace major world religions other than Islam” (p. 85). In the Islamic world, the contemporary wave of religious terrorism has not yet shifted to a different type of terrorism. However, the extremist ideologies driving this wave vary not only from one terrorist group to another but also in time based on their political context. Therefore, it is misleading to think of this wave of violent extremism in the Islamic world as a monolithic ideology triggered by a single event.

Within the contemporary wave of terrorism in the region, there are two extremist currents: Sunni and Shiite. As shown in this study, the emergence of Sunni politico-religious organizations and their parallel universe of violent extremists preceded the Iranian revolution. While the Shiite violent extremism emerged with the Iranian revolution and took its ideology as an inspiration for revolutionary activities, Sunni extremist activities varied from one country to another based on domestic contexts. However, key regional political developments created common causes that in turn created an overlap of strategies for different Sunni mainstream organizations and extremist groups.

In contrast to other countries in the region, where political contexts changed more often, Saudi Arabia enjoyed long periods of a stable political environment. Yet changes in the worldview of extremists in Saudi Arabia occurred within different contexts. Despite the Saudi government's attempts to keep its religious community away from politics, the Kingdom's religious status and economic circumstances opened the country for change. Accelerated modernization in Saudi Arabia's traditional society necessitated outsourcing most of the jobs in the Kingdom, including education. Due to a lack of enough qualified educators and the Kingdom's conservative policy, Saudi Arabia had to rely on educators from neighboring Muslim countries. The subsequent interaction among preachers and students from all over the Islamic world in Saudi Arabia connected young Saudi students with the Islamic awakening that swept the Islamic world in the early 1970s. This interaction produced the Saudi Sahwah (awakening), which combined the Saudi traditional religious teaching with the worldview of other Islamic movements. In contrast to the Islamic awakening that produced a number of politic-religious organizations elsewhere in the Islamic world, the Saudi Sahwah remained a non-institutionalized social movement. In addition to the governmental ban on political organizations, this was due to the political stability and the strength of the Saudi traditional religious establishment. The credibility and legitimacy of the Saudi traditional religious establishment played a major role in discrediting revolutionary impulses. The Sahwah, although promoting a different worldview, shared theological doctrine with the traditional establishment and thus facilitated a peaceful coexistence between the two schools of thought. Ultimately, though, the emergence of new religious trends coupled with Saudi Arabia's fast-track modernization produced a traditional rejectionist group that rebelled against the Sahwah, the traditional religious establishment, as well as the state.

The rejectionist group, Al-Jamaah Al-Salafiah Al-Muhtasibah (JSM) started as a traditional preaching group and went through different revolutionary stages before resorting to violence. In contrast to contemporary Sunni extremist groups, which frame their ideologies around jihad, the JSM espoused an alien apocalyptic ideology. The JSM eventually put its apocalyptic doctrine into practice during a transformative revolutionary period that swept the region after the Iranian revolution. The JSM's takeover of the Grand Mosque in Makkah became a collective suicide mission that ended the group and its ideology in 1979.

The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a paradigm shift in religion's role in politics. The fact that Iranian leadership called for all Muslims to revolt against their governments created a crisis situation during which different dynamics led to more extremism. At the state level, the Iranian revolution demonstrated to governments in the region the threat of their religious oppositions. This, in turn, led to more conservatism in conservative states and more oppression for religious activities in secular states. At the organizational level, the success of Khomeini's politico-religious theory gave extremist entrepreneurs hope to put their ideologies into practice.

Although the Iranian revolution had a major impact on the region in general, its most enduring impact has been on Shiite communities. The revolution shifted the Shiite public perception from seeing themselves as scattered minorities to an ideologically united people. This revival fervor led all religious Shiites to follow Khomeini even though not all of them believed in his political ideology. In countries with Shiite minorities, politico-religious organizations such as the Lebanese Hezbollah emerged and maintained close links with Iran. In contrast, Shiite violence in Saudi Arabia, in particular in the early 1980s, was unorganized violence involving mobs of Shiite pilgrims during the Hajj seasons.



Much of the impact of the Iranian revolution on Sunni violent extremism comes from the fact that it coincided with another important regional development: the Soviet-Afghan war. The impact of the Iranian revolution on governments in the region conditioned their reaction to the Soviet-Afghan war. Support for the Afghan mujahedeen aligned with the increasing conservative trend in conservative states in the region. In secular states, where oppression increased, religious activists found Afghanistan to be a refuge from oppression in their countries. Furthermore, most states in the region viewed the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a direct threat to the region in general.

Politico-religious entrepreneurs exploited the position of some Islamic countries as well as the West and engaged in a global recruitment campaign for the Afghan jihad. After being divided and tied down by domestic struggles, violent extremists from all over the region found themselves supported and united in one camp with a common cause. Despite the ideological and strategic differences between the Afghan jihad and the Iranian revolution, the simultaneous militant training and support that took place in both camps played a major role in the transformation of religious extremism in the region. In 1979, the Iranian revolution and the Afghan jihad marked a threshold in the transformation of both Sunni and Shiite extremism from shattered radical worldviews into organized and trained militant movements.

In the Sunni part of the world, the Afghan jihad in particular had two enduring effects on the evolution of violent extremism: ideological and organizational. The political indoctrination that occurred in the training camps in Afghanistan instilled a radical anti-imperialism mindset in extremists coming from different political backgrounds. This singular mindset bridged ideological gaps among different extremist groups and created bonds that facilitated their cooperation. As a result, a number of groups merged together and others emerged for the first

time. Additionally, training and fight against an organized army revolutionized extremists' organizational culture. Shedding their loose affiliation to religious groups led by theologians, the mujahedeen merged into organized groups led by politically-driven warlords.

The ideological and organizational impact of the Afghan jihad was profound on Saudi jihad veterans in particular. This was due to the nature of the Saudi religious community, which lacked both political and hierarchical organizational cultures. The anti-imperialist experience in Afghanistan continues to shape the worldview of generations of Saudi religious youth. This new ideology created a drift between the Saudi jihad community and its traditional religious establishment. Yet, despite the fact that Saudi jihad veterans returned home with a new political and organizational culture, they did not engage immediately in violence in contrast to veterans from other countries. This was a result of two factors: the stability of the Saudi political environment and the positive attitude of the Saudi government toward the mujahedeen. With the nature of the Saudi religious community in mind, the Saudi government overlooked the ideological and organizational changes within the Saudi jihad community and elected to view them more as humanitarian missionaries.

In contrast, Afghan jihad veterans who returned to unstable political environments or those who were persecuted by their governments were more likely to engage in militant activities, such as in cases in Algeria and Egypt. In both those instances, violence—by and against jihad veterans—resulted not from religiosity but rather from political views and positions toward ongoing domestic conflicts. The interaction between the jihad veteran's worldview and their domestic political environment is an essential element in the evolution of post-Afghan-jihad violent extremism. The behavior of Saudi jihad veterans provides a case in point as their benevolent assimilation into their society turned violent in the wake of the Gulf crisis in 1990.

The 1990 Gulf Crisis brought about a second paradigm shift in the perception of security all over the region. By invading Kuwait and marching toward Saudi Arabia, Saddam Hussein created an international crisis. The crisis reordered the region, reshuffled security alliances, and brought to the region military forces from thirty-four nations. Saddam Hussein turned against the Gulf States, which supported him during his war against Iran. Emerging religious revolutionaries in Algeria and Sudan allied themselves with Saddam for domestic political gain. Even Iran, the natural and mortal enemy of Saddam, opposed the international coalition in an attempt to abort any potential security agreement between the United States and the Gulf States.

For Saudis in particular, the Gulf crisis was the greatest direct security threat to the Kingdom since its establishment. The Kingdom's vulnerability to Saddam's expansion changed the Saudi public perception of insecurity. A threat coming from a Muslim neighboring country redefined Saudi Arabia's security paradigm and shifted Saudis perception of threat. This was more evident within the Saudi religious community as the crisis split the Saudi jihad community and widened the political gap between the Sahwah and the traditional religious establishment. While the traditional ulama supported the government's decision to host international coalition military forces, the Sahwah opposed the decision and warned against its ramifications. Although Sahwah leaders did not advocate violence, their outspoken opposition to the government and the traditional ulama exacerbated the public sense of insecurity and sent a mixed message. Within the Saudi jihad community most of the jihad veterans joined the Sahwah in their peaceful opposition but others allied themselves with Bin Ladin and his international extremist opposition in Sudan. Although the domestic and international oppositions differed sharply on the use of violence, Bin Ladin exploited the symbolic status of the Sahwah leaders by blending his message with theirs in an attempt to attract more Saudis to his international opposition.

The impact of the Gulf crisis was not exclusive to the Sunni jihad community; it also affected the Shiite militants. Despite the ideological division between Sunni and Shiite extremists, the crisis created a chaotic environment wherein their revolutionary ideologies overlapped. The crisis was another turning point in the evolution of violent extremism. In contrast to the relatively unorganized violence during the 1980s, the wave of violence following the Gulf crisis witnessed the emergence of well-trained terrorists. While Saudi jihad veterans put their Afghan-jihad training into practice, Hezbollah-trained Saudi Shiite militants entered the fray with a sophisticated car bombing in 1996. Eventually in the late 1990s the Shiite current receded based on improvements in Saudi-Iranian relations. However, the nature of the Sunni extremist movement, which took the global structure of the Afghan jihad, evolved into a transnational terrorist network.

At the core of the transformation of the classical jihad movement into a contemporary terrorist campaign are two critical ingredients. The first is the ready-to-use anti-imperialism ideological frame, which the contemporary movement crafted in Afghanistan. Although this frame represented a distorted concept of the classical jihad doctrine, its power came from the fact that it was instilled in the mind of everyone who experienced the Afghan jihad. Consequently, this ideological frame resonated among religious communities all over the region despite their ideological differences. Although the Gulf crisis was triggered by the invasion of one Muslim country by another, extremist entrepreneurs were able to frame the increasing presence of the U.S. as an imperialist threat.

The second critical ingredient was the rise of revolutionary extremist governments like the NIF in Sudan and the Taliban in Afghanistan, which used the contemporary extremist movement for domestic revolutionary projects. These governments were instrumental in

providing organizations like Al-Qaeda with bases for training and launching operations. Ultimately, the extremist revolutionary projects in Algeria, Sudan, and Afghanistan failed as the brutality and bloodshed that characterized the birth of these revolutionary regimes alienated the domestic population as well as the international community. Additionally, the swift and positive outcome of the U.S.-led international coalition's operation to restore order in the Gulf worked against Al-Qaeda's message that generated some anti-imperialist sentiment during the early stages of the crisis.

As shown in this study, the writings of a number of Al-Qaeda's theorists indicate that Al-Qaeda's leaders were agitated by the stability in the Gulf region after the war. In their view, the stability caused stagnation in revolutionary and jihad sentiments, which in turn led to weak public support for the contemporary revolutionary projects in the region. As a result, Al-Qaeda found it necessary to create a crisis situation and provoke an excessive U.S. response to revive the movement.

After a series of attacks on U.S. embassies and forces around the world, Al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. mainland in the most heinous terrorist attacks in history. Although they generated a strong U.S. response, the 9/11 terrorist attacks did not help Al-Qaeda's strategic objective. The magnitude of the attacks alienated not only the public but also Al-Qaeda's extremist affiliates who feared the ramifications of associating with the most wanted terrorist organization. Furthermore, the quick fall of Al-Qaeda and its host, the Taliban government, during the first days of the U.S. retaliation campaign invalidated the myth of Al-Qaeda as a super-terrorist organization. The ramifications of the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. retaliation put Al-Qaeda at its lowest ebb since its establishment. Ironically, however, Al-Qaeda's resuscitation came through mismanagement of the global war on terror.

In the wake of the U.S. government's successful initial response to the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government and media continued to inflate Al-Qaeda's operational capabilities and threat. Additionally, President George W. Bush connected Al-Qaeda to Saddam Hussein, who allegedly would provide the organization with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Based on these claims, the U.S. invaded Iraq and created the instability crisis that Al-Qaeda had been trying to create for decades. The 2003 Iraq war served Al-Qaeda at an ideological as well as operational level. At the ideological level, the U.S. invasion of Iraq played into Al-Qaeda's basic ideological portrayal of the U.S. as an aggressor imperial power. Also, the linkage the U.S. tried to make between Saddam and Al-Qaeda did not resonate in the region simply because Saddam had been known as the most secular ruler in the region on whose enmity Al-Qaeda rose in the first place. In fact, taking down the strongest Arab-nationalist dictator gave both Sunni and Shiite extremist groups hopes of taking over Iraq. The fact that the WMD claims turned out to be false hurt U.S. credibility and gave extremists in the region even more ideological ammunition.

At the operational level, the chaotic environment in Iraq became a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda's operatives who were hunted elsewhere. The war in Iraq enabled Al-Qaeda to build and maintain training camps in Iraq to replace the ones it lost in Afghanistan. More importantly, the U.S. occupation of Iraq generated a new defensive jihad movement, which Al-Qaeda co-opted and exported to neighboring countries. Saudi Arabia, in particular, witnessed the most devastating terrorist wave in its history during the Iraq war.

The magnitude of this wave of terror during the Iraq war prompted the formulation of a Saudi comprehensive counterterrorism campaign, in contrast to the first two waves in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to using a minimum-force approach, the Saudi authorities focused on a reeducation program to discredit the extremist ideology and demobilize violent extremists. In

addition to religious studies, participants in the rehabilitation program studied political, psychological, and social sciences. Testimonies of participants who recanted their extremist views indicate a change in their worldview rather than religious beliefs (Al-Zaidan, 2005). This highlights the central role of radical political ideology in mobilizing extremists within the Saudi religious community. Given the large number of extremists who recant their radical worldview, it seems that the Saudi rehabilitation program is working. However, as long as the political context remains stable, it is still too early to judge the decline of violent extremism.

### **Policy Implications**

The policy implications that can be derived from the findings of this study pertain to two main components of counterterrorism policy: prevention and combating. Crafting a policy to prevent terrorism depends first and foremost on every country's political system, within which political policy as well as the interaction between citizens and the state shape citizens' worldview. In the case of developing countries in the Islamic world the establishment of independent political and academic institutions that nurse conflicting worldviews is an essential component of any effective counterterrorism strategy. Without these institutions, people are left to extremist interpretations that go beyond the control of the state apparatus. At the front of combating terrorism, excessive force and heavy-handed policing are counterproductive. Such measures discredit the authorities, alienate people, and push them into the hands of extremist organizations. The fight against violent extremism is an ideological battle, in which force is not the most effective means.

## **Implications for Further Research**

This study attempts to map the links between violent extremists in Saudi Arabia and their mother organizations all over the region. Through the process of tracing these links, some of which are beyond the scope of this study, areas of further research are evident. The first area concerns the general approach to the study of violent extremism in the Islamic world. Most of the research in this area focuses on the Islamic mainstream movements or religious doctrines. However, as shown in this study, most within the traditional religious establishments, Sunnis and Shiites, oppose violent revolutionary ideologies. Violent extremists are often politically-driven groups that exploit the structure and resources of mainstream movements for their own ends. Although research on mainstream movements helps us to understand the dynamics of their interactions and struggles with their governments, it does not explain the evolution of the parallel universe of violent extremism. In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab public uprisings, which brought mainstream movements like the Muslim Brotherhood to power, the dynamics are totally different. The questions of interest here will be: On what ground would violent extremists oppose their new religious governments? Would the new religious governments view subsequent political developments through the same worldview as they did before they come to power?

A second area for further research concerns the rise of Shiite militancy in Iraq. In addition to its impact on Sunni violence, the most profound impact of the Iraq war was on Shiite militancy. However, little research has been done on this aspect of the impact of the Iraq war. The power vacuum in Iraq increased the Iranian influence and opened the door wide for Shiite extremists to establish new militant organizations such as Muqtada Al-Sadr's militia, Jaish Al-Mahdi (the Mahdi Army). Jaish Al-Mahdi is following the steps of Hezbollah, which members of the Sadr family helped to establish in Lebanon in 1982. However, Jaish Al-Mahdi has the



potential to be more powerful than the Lebanese Hezbollah for a number of reasons. The first is its proximity to Iran, from where it receives its ideological and organizational support. Second, in contrast to Hezbollah, Jaish Al-Mahdi operates in a country with a Shiite government and majority, a fact that empowers it and allows it to play a major role in the Iraqi domestic politics in particular and the Shiite affairs in general.

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